

EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

A DASH FOR LIFE



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A DASH FOR LIFE

OR

TRACKED BY TIMBER WOLVES

By COL. SPENCER DAIR

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

CAPTAIN BOB HUNT—An officer in the American Mounted Scouts, that fine band of young men, who are making of the great border land between the United States and Canada, a wonderful place for active development. Bob Hunt is a fighting man of brains, and all the frontier knows of his splendid fight with the outlaws at Table Rock of Long Peak.

GRACE HOPEWELL—The adorable frontier Indian-school teacher, who could fight with the best of them; who was brave, sweet, and clever, and who cut a remarkable figure of patience and devotion to duty on the tablets which hold the records of Montana.

HUGH TRENT—A brave chap, full of battle-lust, who has done much to root out the timber thieves of Montana, and whose perilous mission to Fort Marais, Canada, brought him a bride and a fortune in spite of the dangers through which he passed.

GUS BAXTER—The last of the splendid "Pony Express Riders" of the Great Golden West. A man of nerve, muscle, and vim, who flashes through this story as he flashed over

the Long Trail, between Fort Assiniboine, in Montana, on Milk River, and Fort Marais, in Canada.

SHORT-EAR-CHIEF of the dare-devil Indian band of outlaws, who for years had been the plotting scourge of the Montana, and Canadian border. A murderous, "bad Indian."

DOG-FOOT—The bandit assistant to Short-Ear was like his leader, a type of the meanest man on earth, a crooked Indian thug.

SIDNEY HOLT—The millionaire president of the Montana and Canada Land and Timber Discovery Company. He is a man who chose the devious path when, had he not plotted to gain his fortune by crooked methods, his natural ability would have been sufficient to have achieved great results.

SAM TURCK—The unfortunate station-keeper of the Bitter-water Gap station, on the Frontier Pony Express Line.

DEER-HORN—An Assiniboine Indian, and a right good fellow at that.

SUN-MIST—The wife of Deer-Horn, and an Indian woman that was red to the core, but white in many ways.

WIND-IN-THE-CLOUD—A Squaw-Man, and one of the dreaded band of outlaws led by Short-Ear.

CHAPTER I.

THE RED TRAIL OF THE ASSASSINS.

"Wait, by Gar! Not so fast."

Short-Ear, the Indian bandit, sneered these words in the low burr of the Bannack Indian dialect.

Dog-Foot, his chief aide and murderous assistant, snarled an answer.

"Must hurry. We get caught. See, over there in the East? The morning breaks."

Dog-Foot, a Nez Percés Indian, pointed as he spoke

where through the forest showed the gleam of the coming day.

"Never mind the morning," replied Short-Ear, "eh? You want to get killed? Sam Turck wake up soon. He find us here. Then he kill two Indian, by Gar!"

The two Indians glared at each other.

For a moment, it looked as if a deadly duel would follow.

Around the two red-men was the splendid American forest in mid-summer.

Only twenty-five miles from Fort Assiniboine, on

Milk River, in Montana, and hardly fifty miles from the Canada line, the two Indians might just as well be buried in the depths of the far North-West, so far as absolute solitude was concerned.

Short-Ear, a tall copper-colored Indian, whose regular features were scowling with mad rage, was well known in Northern Montana.

He was a "bad-Indian."

His gang of bandits was the scourge of the country. Fortunately, he lived most of the time on the Canadian side of the border-line.

This made it easier for the Americans to bear his presence when he stole among them. The Canadians were equally glad of his absence from their land.

Short-Ear, with a great effort, regained command of himself.

"Why we fight, by Gar," he said.

Dog-Foot shrugged his shoulders with the terse manner of an Indian, who like all of his breed hated to talk.

"By Gar," added Short-Ear, "you go so fast my feet weary. Why you hurry so heap much, Dog-Foot?"

"Must hurry. No time to lose," muttered Dog-Foot. "We no kill white man if he get up by morning light. We get there quick. We kill him 'fore he up from his last sleep."

"Very good, very good," answered Short-Ear, "we leave Fort Assiniboine in big hurry. We travel so fast now, I get weary. Kill white man; good, but not kill self. No, not much good that."

Dog-Foot grunted.

But he redoubled his speed.

The best pace that Short-Ear could muster, was required for him to keep up with his companion.

But after his first complaint, Short-Ear made no further plea for less speed.

The two Indians were dressed in short jackets, trimmed fantastically with green, red, and yellow beads. They wore long, tight deer-skin trousers that reached to the knees, where long moose-skin leggings met them.

The feet of each Indian wore moccasins.

Each carried two great revolvers hanging to a cartridge-belt, strapped about the waist.

A hunting knife peeped from the bosom of the jacket of each man.

Each bore a long, magazine rifle, which was quite as good, as any white man carried.

And each bore a ten gallon tin can of kerosene.

"My pack, he heavy," cried Short-Ear at length. "I carry this oil way back from fort. By Gar, oil he heavy."

"We will need oil," replied Dog-Foot. "We no kill Sam Turck, less we take oil."

"What you going do with oil; this oil he break my back," added Short-Ear. "I no like carry pack like French-Canada man on back."

"You great lazy Indian. You no great Chief head of bandit gang. Ugh, you no good, lazy Indian," replied Dog-Foot.

"I get money to kill Sam Turck, not pack oil," put in Short-Ear.

"You keep still. You get cash and kill too, and you no get cash or kill Sam Turck either, if you no pack oil. Savez?" replied Dog-Foot.

The two Indians thus hurried on for nearly an hour.

Short-Ear, after his protest, made amazing speed.

At the top of a little wooded hill, Dog-Foot stopped

beneath an ash tree, and with a grunt took the can of kerosene from his back.

"Look!" he said as he pointed down to the valley beneath.

Short-Ear saw a beautiful scene.

A white road had been cleft out of the great forest. It ran like a long winding ribbon, a white band that was to be seen for miles.

Directly beneath the feet of the Indian was an adobe hut, its log sides and roof, having been plastered by the mineral filled earth of the land about it.

What was, evidently, a stable for horses, stood at one side of the log cabin, while near by grazing a few cows and horses, while a family of chickens was busily engaged in scratching away, although the first glint of the morning was only to be seen, and the clear stars of Montana's splendid summer nights were still twinkling in the sky.

"That the Pony Express station, eh?" asked Dog-Foot.

"Yes."

"Where Sam Turck live?"

"Yes. He keep the station."

"Where the Pony Express rider, Gus Baxter, change his horse dat, eh?"

"Yes. Last station dis between Fort Assiniboine, in Montana, and Fort Marais, over the Canada border."

"Sam Turck, he keep dis station?"

"Yes."

"Sam Turck live all alone?"

"Yes. He live here all alone. He much keep station here for horse of Pony Express rider."

"I told you dat before, stupid Indian."

"Well, what of dat? We now go kill Sam Turck. Den we go get money from Big White Chief."

The two Indians looked down upon the sleeping station, which stood out under the light of the stars, as plain as if it had been daylight.

At length Short-Ear spoke.

"Has Sam Turck got dog?"

"Yes."

"What you do 'bout dog?"

Dog-Foot pulled a bit of meat out from under his jacket.

"I go give dog meat," he said, "Dog eat meat, dog curl up and die. We no longer fear dog. Ugh."

Short-Ear nodded.

With the nod, Dog-Foot disappeared in the thick underbrush. He could be seen as he noiselessly slid down the hill toward the station.

A big dog, the only guardian of Bitterwater Gap station on the Frontier Pony Express line, the only quick medium of communication between Fort Assiniboine and Fort Marais, in Canada, heard the Indian coming, and with a short truculent bark, bounded at him.

The Indian never stirred. Instead he threw at the ugly, savage, wolf-dog, the bit of poisoned meat, and as he did so, climbed up a tree with great celerity.

The dog swallowed the meat with a gulp. It was his last swallow, for the poisoned food soon ended the animal's life, with a thrashing of tortured legs in the bushes, and hardly a faint howl to tell his sleeping master of the danger about him.

Then Dog-Foot hurried down the tree, and rejoined Short-Ear who was awaiting him with the stoic patience of the true Indian.

"Dog he dead," was all that Dog-Foot said as he

picked up one of the oil cans, and began silently hurrying through the bushes and rank vegetation, toward the station.

"What we do next?" asked Dog-Foot, who, now that the station was reached, insisted in giving back the leadership to Short-Ear.

On the way to the station Dog-Foot took the place of leader, because he did not know where the station could be found by going through the dense forest.

Neither Indian cared to go to Bitterwater Gap station by way of the road over which the horse of Gus Baxter, Pony Express rider, darted each day, either in going to, or coming from, one end or the other of his perilous journey.

The Indians' mission was one of blood.

The were bent on a murderous errand.

So Dog-Foot, who knew the way through the trackless wilds was installed as leader for the trip, Short-Ear, who was the real leader, falling back to the place of the lead, although usually, he did the planning for his treacherous gang of Indian and half-breed bandits, the terror of the country, quite as much as ever Jesse James and his band, terrorized the middle West.

"Now we here, you boss," whispered Dog-Foot.

Short-Ear nodded.

"Cut brush," he replied.

He showed his companion what he meant by cutting small bushes from the underbrush.

These he formed into a sort of broom, which he then fastened to a tall sapling, making a gigantic handle about ten feet long, from one end of which the brush stuck out quite like a great broom.

Dog-Foot made the same kind of a broom, and with these queer looking things on their shoulders, and carrying the usual rifle tightly in one hand, and the cans of oil under their arms, the two savages gently crept down to the white road, across it, and softly stole to the shadows that clung about the long adobe station house.

There the Indians listened long and attentively.

Not a sound could be heard, except the low steady breathing of some one asleep in the station cabin, and the calls of the night animals and birds, which echoed through the forest, as they told of the approach of day.

"All right. Sam Turck he sleeps," whispered Short-Ear.

He stooped, as he spoke, and with his hunting knife, cut the entire top of the can containing the ten gallons of kerosene out, thus making a great cup.

Then he cut a few short strands from his long black hair which hung far below his shoulders.

He threw the strands in the air.

Then he knew which way the wind was blowing.

Short-Ear, as soon as he had discovered the direction of the wind, moved the can so, that as he dipped his brush broom in it, he could then shower the sides and top of the long cabin with the inflammable, deadly liquid.

His was the thought of an incendiary Indian, bound to surely set fire to the home of a foe, no matter what trouble the act caused.

Like rain, the kerosene fell on the doomed cabin.

Dog-Foot caught the idea of his chief in a moment. He ripped open the remaining ten gallon can of oil.

His broom of brushes soon was sending its rainy, misty, deadly cargo over upon the cabin, each Indian keeping clear of the stuff by standing so that the wind blew away from them, but directly upon the cabin.

Over and over, the two men sent the deadly vapor on its mission of death.

"Ugh," at length remarked Dog-Foot, "oil all gone."

"Mine too," replied Short-Ear.

"What next?" queried Dog-Foot.

"You hide bushes, front of cabin. I hide bushes, back of cabin. When Sam Turck run out your way, you shoot, kill him. If he come my way, I shoot, kill him. See?"

"Surely, I see," replied Dog-Foot, as he hurried by stealthy steps toward his assigned place of concealment.

Before he went to his side of the cabin, Dog-Foot's companion, with wily Indian forethought, took a large bit of brush with which he went over the entire ground about the cabin, and effaced traces of any Indian moccasin. No one would bear evidence against him by fitting either his or Dog-Foot's moccasin into tracks made in the foot or more of dust that lay thick on every side.

"Good," said Dog-Foot as he watched Short-Ear's forethought.

Short-Ear then stole with cat-like tread, so softly pressing the ground with the toes of his feet, that not a single impression was left in the earth to the cabin.

He leaned over.

There was a flash, as he ignited his match.

A single star of flame remained, as the Indian stole back to cover.

Then silence fell.

Two lean brown tubes were trained from each side of the cabin, as the structure was built half within the shield of a hill that towered above it.

The tubes were the rifle muzzles of the two bandits.

The star of flame had become a great comet of striding fire.

It seemed to stand still a moment. Then it caught the great space of oil soaked wood.

"Whoof!"

Thus sounded the sharp little explosion with which the kerosene caught fire.

In ten seconds, the fire ran up the roof of the cabin; down over the sides, and then the entire structure was ablaze.

No sound yet from the sleeping man, Sam Turck, who was within, weary with his day of toil, and in the early hours, trying to restore his lost energy.

The flames swept on, making great towers of swirling smoke that arose thick and pungent on the still night air.

Then there came a cry of alarm. The cry was one of fear and pain.

The flames now had crept into the cabin. They licked up the dry, oil stained timbers like mad.

Again, there rang out a dreadful cry of anguish.

It stirred the depths of the forest with its wild appeal.

A door burst open.

From out of the cabin dashed a tall tower of flame from which came hideous screams for aid.

It was Sam Turck, the station-keeper.

He was a mass of flames that were burning him to a cinder.

His moans were those of a man in agonizing peril of his life.

But the rifles of the two Indians stilled the cries almost immediately.

The shots rang over the scene, as two jets of flame crept from the muzzles of the rifles.

Sam Turck, aged man, old trapper and hunter had met his fate at last.

With a last wild yell of pain and horror, he fell on his side, with bullet wounds through his head and his heart, dead; while the flames the Indian bandits had kindled, licked the flesh from his bones, and in less than half an hour a charred, smoking corpse was all that was left of the brave white man, who lay near the charred and blackened ruins, still smoking, of Bitterwater Gap station, of the Frontier Pony Express Line.

CHAPTER II.

THE BANDITS AT HOME.

"Ugh!"

"How."

These exclamations met the two Indian bandits, Short-Ear and Dog-Foot, two hours later, when they rode into their camp, which was situated on Mills River, about twenty miles through the immense forest, from where they had left the murdered remains of Sam Turck.

The bandit camp was situated in a large cave, half way up a great mountain.

It had been so placed by the treacherous Short-Ear, so that he could always keep a look-out from his airy perch.

The country all around about was to be seen by any watcher. There could be no surprise of the camp unless the watcher was asleep at his post. No member of the gang of bandits cared to thus flirt with death by not attending to duty. No general ever visited dereliction of duty with quicker punishment than Short-Ear, the bandit.

The bandit gang at the time in question consisted of about twenty-five young men, all Indians or half-breeds, with a few exceptions.

These exceptions came from white men who had married squaws in Short-Ear's band and thus had become members of it.

One of these, whose white name was now merged in his Indian one of Wind-In-The-Cloud, was the guard who greeted the two chief bandits when they arrived in the camp.

Among the Squaw-men, in the bandit camp, Wind-In-The-Cloud was the most looked up to of any of the white men. Usually the Indians greatly disliked the white husband of a red wife.

"All well?" asked Wind-In-The-Cloud of the two bandit chiefs.

"All well," came the quick reply. "Anyone come?"

"Yes."

"Who?" asked Short-Ear.

"White man."

"Had he the pass-word?"

"Yes."

Short-Ear thought awhile to himself. His lowering face showed that his meditation was an important one.

"Tell one of our young men to take these horses far away and sell them," Short-Ear finally remarked. "They smell too much of Sam Turck's blood to be safe in our camp. They might be traced to us, and as Dog-Foot knows, it is well not to have them here."

Both the Indians had dropped the laconic slang they used as a point of honor when on the war-path. They

now talked quite like white men for each, although neither was more than twenty-five years of age, from childhood had associated with white-folk, and spoke English quite like their white brothers.

Short-Ear then turned again to Dog-Foot, and asked him to leave him alone with Wind-In-The-Cloud for a few moments.

As soon as Dog-Foot had departed within the cave, leaving his companions at its entrance, Short-Ear continued the conversation.

"Did you talk with the white man who is here?" he asked.

"No," replied Wind-In-The-Cloud.

"Was the white man alone?"

"Yes."

"Did he come on horse back?"

"Yes."

"Was he well armed?"

"He carried revolvers in his belt, and a rifle. That was all that I could see. He may have had other weapons concealed in his garments."

Short-Ear nodded.

"Did he have other things?" Short-Ear continued.

"On his shoulders was strapped a knapsack," replied Wind-In-The-Cloud.

"Was it a heavy one?"

"Yes. The white man seemed to set much store by it."

"Where did you place the white man?"

"In the inner cave."

"Good. I will go and talk with him."

Short-Ear strode away quickly, while Wind-In-The-Cloud threw his rifle over his shoulder and began his weary tramp about the cave in a wide circle, his glances meanwhile shooting here and there as he tried to detect the arrival of any possible enemy.

The bandits, when on American soil, were careful of themselves.

They knew that they were constantly watched by the American Scouts that splendid body of young men, who made it their business to drive all lawless men from the American border.

So Wind-In-The-Cloud was unceasing in his careful watchfulness.

Short-Ear strode along like a man in the hurry of a great purpose.

He entered the great cave where his band lay at rest, but hardly replied to their greetings.

Nearly every Indian was dressed like their chief, although some had gone even further and were dressed in American Cow-boy garb.

The cave was well supplied with furs. The ground was completely covered with them, all rare, and expensive, and most of them gotten in the Canadian North-West where the band often strayed on some of its predatory marches.

The Indians stood respectfully while Short-Ear, their leader, passed by them.

As soon as he had gone they continued the pursuits which he had interrupted.

Some of the men were gambling; others were smoking, still others sleeping for it was a day of rest for them, they having marched many miles from the border line the day previous.

From the large cave, a smaller one had been hollowed out by the members of the gang as the private room of their leader.

Like the outer room, it bore many furs of value as

a ground covering, while a few twisted willow chairs, a couch, and some small seats, also made of willow twigs, made up the remainder of the furniture in the place.

Standing in the center of the cave was a white man.

He was no border white man it was plain to be seen.

His short, stubby form was cased in a suit of London-made riding clothes.

His cartridge-belt around his waist was all askew. His revolvers swung far back, where his hand could not have reached them had he wished, without much awkward grappling, that would have given an enemy, as sure as Short-Ear, an immense advantage in a fight with the natural weapons of the time and place, the American made revolver.

High riding boots, and the tiny wheeled, sharp spur, instead of the great Spanish rowel, marked the stranger as an Eastern man.

But a felt derby hat on his head, instead of the wide-brimmed sombrero, was the climax in the mind of Short-Ear.

"A tender-foot," the Indian thought.

Yet, after all, there was something that commanded respect in the stranger. He looked like Ready Money, and, Indian as he was, Short-Ear knew what Ready Money was.

Had any financial man from Wall street, in New York City, heard the name that Short-Ear quickly spoke with profound respect, they would know at once that it stood for Ready Money!

"This is Mr. Sidney Holt?" queried Short-Ear, with a low bow.

"Yes," came the reply in a throaty voice, while the two keen eyes of the speaker looked the Indian over, classified and ticketed him, in a jiffy.

The fat red face of the visitor did not change its expression, as he awaited the second question from the Indian.

"Have you brought the twenty-five thousand dollars with you?" asked Short-Ear.

"Yes."

"Will you pay it over now?"

"When you have delivered the goods."

"That is, when you are sure that I have killed Sam Turck."

"Yes."

"Sam Turck is dead."

"How do I know that?"

"Are you not going to pay over that cash until you are sure that he is dead?"

"I am not."

Into Short-Ear's eyes there came a vindictive gleam.

"Is not that rather a foolish thing to say, especially when you are alone and we are many here?" hissed the Indian.

"Not a bit. You would not dare to take the risk of killing me for the cash. It would mean that while you would get the thousands easy enough, there would be too much hue and cry over my death to suit you."

The white man spoke as he lived in an indirect manner, like the plotter that he was at all times.

The Indian bit his lip. He knew that the white man spoke the truth.

"The sudden disappearance of Sidney Holt, millionaire-president of the Montana and Canada Land and Timber Discovery Company, it is true, would

make a great deal of talk in not only Wall street, but in Washington where you live," the Indian continued.

"Oh yes," replied Sidney Holt, "because when I left Fort Assiniboine I gave to a friend there, a letter."

"Oh, what was in the letter?"

"It detailed my coming here to meet you, gave a blue print picture of the route you told me to take, and ended by saying that in five days time if I did not return you were to be found and made to tell why I had not returned. The letter further told that I had agreed to meet you here."

Short-Ear was surprised.

"Great precautions," he smiled. "Did the letter contain anything else?"

"My will."

"What?"

"Yes. My will. And one of the clauses in that will was that my estate of a good many dollars, was not to be settled until you were caught and hanged for my murder."

"What?"

"And every man of your bandit gang was to be caught also and hanged."

"You dare say this to my face?"

"Certainly. Why not? I say anything I want to in the presence of any man. There is one thing more. My estate is worth several millions. I do not think it would take more than a half million to catch your band and hang every one. So I think I am pretty safe here with your bandit crowd, at that."

Short-Ear stared. Then he burst into laughter.

Sidney Holt, millionaire, then quietly sat down in a willow chair, took a very expensive cigar from his pocket lighted it, and between great clouds of smoke sang this ditty:—

"My father was from Boston,
My uncle was Judge Lynch,
So darn your fire and roasting,
You can not make me flinch."

As Holt was alone, amid a gang of fierce and blood-thirsty bandits, miles away from any civilized place, with \$25,000 in gold in a knapsack at his feet, the exhibition of nerve was admirable—so admirable, that Short-Ear, leader of the bandit gang was greatly pleased.

"You are what they call back East, 'the goods,'" Short-Ear cried. "Now what do you want to prove, that Sam Turck is dead?"

"Any mark about him that you might describe, would make me know first, that you knew him and had marked him as your prey."

"How will this do?" remarked the Indian, as he threw a half charred bit of flesh in the lap of the banker.

Holt picked up the flesh.

He dropped it as if it had been a red-hot iron.

It was the thumb and part of the thumb's upper joint of a white man.

With a twinkle in his eye, Short-Ear picked up the human thumb, and pointed out to the staring eyes of the millionaire a tiny square tattooed in the thumb near the joint, in the center of which were the two letters "S. T."

"You know Sam Turck, did you not?" purred the Indian in such a soft voice.

"Yes," replied the surprised banker and millionaire faintly.

"You knew of this mark on his thumb?"

"Yes."

"Will you pay over the money now?"

For answer Holt kicked the leather knapsack at his feet toward the Indian.

Holt's face was held in firm control, but his feelings were betrayed by the whiteness about his mouth.

"You killed Sam Turck, I see," he remarked and his voice was almost inaudible.

"Yes," replied Short-Ear, "we killed him, Dog-Foot and I."

Then he detailed the terrible death of the unfortunate Pony Express rider station-man's death.

Holt grew whiter and whiter as the sickening tale was unfolded. He looked like a man who was about to faint, and finally, when the Indian told of the screams and groans of the burning man, and told how he and his companion had poured shots from their rifles into the dying form, Holt jumped up and ran to the outer part of the cave.

"I must have air," he murmured. "Give me air."

Holt soon recovered himself. His nerves recovered their tone and he returned to Short-Ear with his grip upon his feelings fully recovered.

Short-Ear sat on a great Buffalo robe when Holt re-entered his private room.

He was coolly counting the little stacks of gold which he had heaped about him.

"I see that you pay me in gold," he said with his cunning leer. "It is better that way. Gold can not be traced, eh? Greenbacks can be traced. I know much trouble comes from greenbacks. Bills have numbers and I do not like them. Yes, it is true as you white men say, 'money talks,' and sometimes it talks in the way that means this."

Short-Ear leered as he made the motion of a hangman putting a rope around the neck of a condemned man.

"Be careful," said Holt. "We must stick together in this case."

"If we do not, we will hang separately, eh?" returned Short-Ear.

Holt shuddered.

Short-Ear was used to deeds of violence. He had so long been daily face to face with death, that he was used to his situation and loved to make jokes as to his punishment if he was found to be the man who had committed the crimes which he was daily doing, quite as a matter of business.

Holt wondered at him.

"You would kill me tomorrow," Holt said, "if some one would pay you?"

"I would kill you for twenty-five dollars."

"But you asked me twenty-five thousand dollars to kill Sam Turck for me."

"Yes, but you were willing to pay a good price for the ending of a good man. Your worthless life is only worth the small sum I set."

Holt pressed his lips together to hide his anger. But he thought of the banks far back in the East who had sent him word that he must take up millions of dollars' worth of loans.

He thought of the millions that would surely come to him in case Sam Turck and one other person, was out of the way; now nearly all of the stumbling-blocks between him and the millions were removed. Sam Turck was dead. He was willing to pay the price exacted by the Indian bandit.

Holt's face kept the secret of his thoughts well hidden. He allowed no trace of his feelings to appear to the quiet watchful eyes of the false-hearted Indian.

At length Holt spoke.

"What are you going to do with all your money?" he asked curiously.

"One quarter comes to me. One-eighth goes to Dog-Foot, who helped me kill Sam Turck. The rest I shall divide among my gang according to each man's rank. There will be much money for us all. A good day's work, quite the best we have had in years. Ho! Ho!"

Holt's face was the picture of disgust.

But he had much more to exact from the Indian bandit, and so after a breath, Holt continued.

"There is as much more money coming to you if you will take more risk," he added.

Short-Ear's eyes twinkled with cupidity.

"Good," he said. "Good. Tell me all."

"The removal of Sam Turck does much good for me," Holt continued. "It is a good work that you have done, but to carry out my plans and make sure of my success, there is another matter that you may take up."

"What is it?"

"It concerns a woman."

"That is not good. I hate to kill a woman. They scream so when they die. Besides there is so much more fuss made over the death of a woman. Out here the white men fight for the woman. East, the white men fight to over-come a woman. Here it is dangerous to kill anything but men. Men out here expect to die, with their boots on, eh?"

"You will not take the job?"

"First tell me the job. Then I decide."

"There is a woman that must be — ah, removed, before we can call our case exactly clear of trouble."

"What trouble, you mean, eh?"

"I mean that there is a woman who does not know yet, that she is in my way."

"Yes? You want her killed lest she know, eh?"

"Exactly."

"Is she an old woman?"

"No, a young woman, and I hear a very pretty young woman, at that."

"Bad! Bad! A pretty young woman. Oh, some white man love her. Wow! I kill here and I kill there, but men always. No kill a woman whom a white man love. He worse than to face a grizzly bear robbed of her whelps. No, no kill white girl. Not I."

Holt swore under his breath.

"Now I gave you twenty-five thousand dollars for — ah, removing Sam Turck. What if I give you fifty thousand dollars more, if you kill this young woman?"

"That better. Fifty thousand dollars a heap big money. With what I got that make me rich. I no kill any man or woman after that, eh? I get to be a 'good Indian!'"

Short-Ear laughed a treacherous smile of content as he spoke.

"You see I kill Sam Turck," he went on, "because I need money and because long time go he make me get my name, 'Short-Ear.'"

"He gave you your name of 'Short-Ear?'"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I young Indian boy. I like children. I steal chicken from Sam Turck's chicken-yard. He tell all

around next Indian boy to steal his chicken he put his mark on Indian boy. I steal chicken. He catch me stealing. He cut my right ear off so—"

Short-Ear as he spoke raised the long hair that hung about his shoulders.

Holt saw that only half an ear remained on the Indian's head. It was a scarred maimed member, disgusting in its deformity.

"Sam Turck, he nail other piece of my ear on his chicken-coop. He say it a scare-crow to frighten away all other red devils. I go back my tepee. Old Indian woman she call me 'Short-Ear.' I still called Short-Ear."

Holt marveled at the exceeding matter-of-fact manner in which this tale of Western justice was told.

Short-Ear meanwhile was laughing to himself.

He had picked up the gristly bit of charred bone and flesh, which once had been the right hand thumb of Sam Turck.

He was fondling the awful morsel and laughing to himself.

The picture showed the terrible vindictiveness of this perfidious savage, whom no white man could ever tame, or make him see his life except through a red-man's eyes.

"Short-Ear," said Holt, "Why are you laughing?"

"I laugh to think that this part of Sam Turck's hand held my ear when he cut it from my head. Ho! Ho! Ho!"

The shrill mocking laugh of the Indian quite filled the cave.

He had waited years for his vengeance. It had come, bringing him his fortune.

Holt shook his head. He hardly breathed. The Indian was such a monument of satisfied blood-lust.

"But do you wish to go on with this matter?" asked Holt.

"Let me go and talk to Dog-Foot," replied the savage. He vanished from the cave.

Holt felt weak and sick at heart. He regretted, for a moment, that he had entered into the blood pact; but when he thought of his nearly protested notes; the imminent peril of financial disaster in which he stood, he gathered himself together.

"There is no other way," he whispered to himself. "I must go on with this now. Why be squeamish just now. There is only one more life to take. Why not pay this red cur to take it. No one can ever trace back to me the payment of the money to these men. I am safe no matter what happens. But I must get that girl's life."

As his thoughts wandered over his plans seeking for some flaw in them, and in his opinion finding none, Short-Ear re-appeared.

"I talk to Dog-Foot," he said quickly. "We take the case up. Oh, yes we will kill the girl for you, but we no do strike at her. We not kill her right out. We make up plot. We kill her, but make it look like what you call an accident."

Short-Ear smiled with immense cunning as he spoke.

Holt saw the plans of the Indians was the best possible to be made. He saw how hard it would be to assassinate a woman out in the part of the country where there was so much civilization without being detected.

He thought a long while, and then asked Short-Ear

what his plan was, adding that he would like to know it before making a final bargain.

"Never you mind," the Indian answered. "How we kill girl is my business, not yours. You come here and pay the money when we kill girl, eh?"

Holt saw that he would not be able to carry matters further unless he chimed in with the plans of the savages.

"Very good," he said at length. "I make the bargain. I will be willing to pay the cash over when I hear that the girl is dead by accident or any other means."

"Now tell me who the girl is?"

"Her name is Grace Hopewell."

"Where she live?"

"At Fort Assiniboine."

"Ah."

"She is a tall girl, with brown hair and eyes, good teeth, pretty dimple in left cheek. Nice girl to look at."

"Yes."

"She is an orphan. She is about twenty years old and is going to a school in the Fort. She teaches in the school, I think."

"Yes, yes. I know her."

"You know her?"

"Yes. Know most all people in and about the Fort. I go there often. All know me there."

"Isn't there danger in that?"

"No. They no think I a danger. Look on me to be a poor shiftless Indian."

"Doesn't anyone suspect that you are the leader of the gang of bandits over which you are captain?"

"Some do. Not many."

"Who suspects you?"

"Bob Hunt."

"Who is he?"

"Belongs to American Mounted Scouts."

Holt's face grew grave.

"That is bad," he said.

"Why?"

"Those American Scouts are a pretty bad lot to get in wrong with."

"Why?"

"They have recently been organized among the old Indian fighters and the bravest young men on the Montana-Canadian border. They have been busy cleaning out just such gangs as you head. You are all smugglers, thieves, cattle-stealers; assassins."

"Yes, we bad lot," admitted Short-Ear. "But no scout get us just yet."

"I hate to run foul of the Scouts," remarked Holt.

"Never fear," answered the Indian, "we keep away from Scouts."

"You had better."

Both men for a short space were busy with their own thoughts. Holt on his side saw that the plans of Short-Ear seemed to be well laid. He knew, also, that he was powerless to stop, now that he had begun.

So he rose, and said that it was time for him to leave.

"I want to get back to Fort Assiniboine by late to-night," he said. "It is a far ride yet; now that my horse has rested I must take a chance, and try and get home there as soon as possible."

"You live at the Fort?" asked the Indian.

"Oh no."

"Where you live?"

"I have a hunting box, or a small ranch, near the Fort. That is where I spend some of my summers."

"Good. Then we can send word there."

"You may, but be careful how you do it."

"Never you fear. You get message bimeby. Then you answer it. You no get caught."

Again the red man made the motion of putting a rope about a criminal's neck.

Holt's face wore a pained look.

"Stop that, I say. It makes me nervous," he said.

"You white men so funny," rejoined Short-Ear.

"You pay Indian to kill, but you 'fraid of what will happen. Ugh."

Together the two conspirators left the cave.

The horse of Holt stood pawing the ground in impatience. The animal was a splendid English hunter.

He would carry his owner back to his ranch in quick time, the Indian thought.

"Be very careful," Holt warned.

"You no worry," cried Short-Ear, "Grace Hopewell is good as dead. We kill her soon, and we get that fifty-thousand cash reward. You sleep well. We get girl bimeby. Maybe no more week. Maybe two weeks. But we will see she die soon. Ho! Ho! "



CHAPTER III.

A GIRL'S PERIL.

"The tree! Look out, the tree is falling!"

With a shout, Bob Hunt, trapper and American Mounted Scout, yelled this warning.

His words rang through the forest, and attracted the attention of the other members of his party, Grace Hopewell, Hugh Trent, Deer-Horn, an Indian guide, and Sun-Mist, his Indian wife.

The party was deep in the woods, on the Long Trail that ran from Fort Assiniboine, to Fort Marais, whither Grace Hopewell was bound, having accepted a position as teacher in the Indian school at the latter Canadian point.

Hugh Trent was from the United States Land Office, and had been assigned to report on the question of timber lands in Northern Montana, and on the Canadian border.

Deer-Horn, a faithful Assiniboine Indian guide, and his impassive wife, with good Bob Hunt, made up the remainder of the party, and they had been traveling along in the early afternoon of a hot summer day, when Bob Hunt, who was in the lead, shouted his warning.

The situation was extremely critical.

The party had proceeded down the trail until it dipped to the left and ran down a steep grade.

The splendid monarchs of the forest were denser here than at any other point.

They made on each side of the trail, almost a solid wall of great timber amid which the underbrush and second growth timber was so thick that no one could penetrate it.

The trail was not more than six feet wide, and when one started along it, one was in a sort of trench of forest, with great trees, luxuriant in growth, whose leafy branches made almost a tropical scene; a scene only possible in the Montana forests, where probably the foot of man had not pressed the ground for many years.

At the top of a slight hill the trail ran more open in its winding; and there right ahead was to be seen

a wonderful large pine tree, tottering and twisting on its base.

The tree was easily twenty-five feet in diameter, and must have been more than a hundred feet in height.

It was tottering toward the narrow passage-way of the trail.

It was falling directly upon the head of the little party, which Bob Hunt led.

The trail having become so narrow, all the party had dismounted. The two Indians were bringing up the rear with the riding horses and two led pack-animals of the party.

As has been said, Bob Hunt was in the lead.

Next came Grace Hopewell, her sweet face aglow with health. Directly behind her came Hugh Trent, who liked to look often into the blue eyes of the charming girl.

When he heard Hunt cry out, Trent without ceremony grasped Grace by the arm and swung her quickly back of him. The action showed the splendid strength of the young government official; and then, as each face was blanched in horror, Bob Hunt came charging back toward the rest of the party, a veritable man of deeds and courage.

"The tree is bound to fall down this trail," he shouted. "We only have a moment to try and save ourselves. Press hard to the right into the underbrush. We may escape that way."

The party followed this order delivered as it was at the top of a fine pair of lungs.

Trent assisted Grace to crawl as far down as she could in the smallest hollow of the trail, and almost rudely thrust her sideways into the bushes that scored and bruised her face and arms.

The two Indians with true Indian cunning had seen the danger almost as quickly as had Hunt.

They simply disappeared into the landscape. They were safe in a moment.

Hunt himself followed the Indians' lead; and fearing that there was little hope of saving either himself or any of the whites in the cavalcade, Hunt awaited the crash.

The tree tottered. It swung around. It fell forward with a great sough of wind; while trees that would have been considered tall, if it had not been that one had seen this gigantic pine, the Monarch of the Forest, were swept under it like a tiny chip disappearing under the mighty waves of a storm-swept sea.

With a crash that sounded like the explosion of a great park of artillery, the tree fell directly down the narrow trail where the defenceless party of travelers were cowering.

When the tree struck the earth, Grace Hopewell thought the world had come to an end.

Never had she heard such a dreadful crash. Splinters covered her like rain. Something struck her a fearful blow across her shoulders.

She lost consciousness.

When she came to herself again, she was being lifted from under a large bough of the tree. It was this which had struck her.

"No bones broken," she heard Bob Hunt cry. "Anyone killed?"

Hunt gently assisted the girl to a place of greater safety across from the tree at one side of the trail.

Grace shuddered as she saw Trent standing in the

trail wiping the dripping blood from a nasty cut on his scalp. But he at least was alive.

Pinned under the tree, dead, with its back crushed, was one of the pack-horses. The other animals were plunging in fright amid the broken limbs of the tree, and the Indian man and woman who appeared from nowhere, apparently, were trying to quiet the frightened animals.

It was a sight she never forgot.

In the foreground, hale and hearty, Hunt was yelling orders.

The great tree, whose massive trunk seemed only a few hours before able to resist the centuries of oncoming days, was now shivered into a dozen lengths of timber.

Trent bound up his head with his handkerchief, which Grace after her own hurts were looked to by the Indian woman, insisted in replacing the handkerchief by a bandage taken from her valise strapped to the dead pack-horse.

"Hurry up, Deer-Horn," cried Bob Hunt: "Get the pack off that dead horse and distribute it about the other animals. When you get your head fixed, Trent, come over here. Get an axe off the pack horse. We have got to hew a path out for ourselves so we can get the horses by this wreck. I would like to know why that big tree tumbled just when it did."

Trent soon joined Hunt and the two strong men made the woods ring with the music of their axes as they hewed away at the wreck and began making a path through which to proceed on their journey.

"I can't understand this matter at all," said Hunt to Trent as he hewed away.

"What matter?" asked Trent.

"The fall of that tree."

"It is not unusual for a tree to fall in these great forests, eh?"

"Not at all for a rotten time-worn tree to fall. This tree isn't rotten."

Trent looked carefully over the fallen monarch.

"By Jove, you are right," he answered. "This tree is as sound as a dollar. It would have stood for years if—by George, what is this?"

As Trent spoke he pointed to the base of the tree.

There, at about five feet from the ground, was the plain mark of a cross-cut saw. The tree had been sawed in two.

Both men darted to the tree stump at the top of the incline, or hill whence it had fallen.

The stump was smooth; the teeth of the saw could be plainly seen, while a little pile of saw-dust added evidence to the mute testimony so clearly presented.

Trent and Hunt stood looking at each other in open mouthed wonder.

"It was not due to nature that the great tree fell right where it looked a pretty sure thing to kill us," said Hunt. "This is a plant. Some one is trying to kill us. It was a brave attempt at our murder."

Trent looked serious.

"It can not be possible. Who would want to kill us?"

"I do not know," replied Hunt. "But some one cut that tree down. Some one managed to have it fall while we were passing. I will bet my head to a foot ball, that somewhere among these limbs we will find the rope with which the conspirators tottered the tree on its base as we came along, and directed its fall into the narrow trail."

Hunt then began a search among the branches of the tree.

At length he gave a loud cry of success.

Trent hurried to where the American Scout stood.

He held in his hands a new rope-end. The remainder of the rope could be seen twined about the tree.

"Just as I thought, Hugh," said Hunt. "Someone had sawed the tree almost through at its base. Then the cowards tied this rope about the tree about fifty feet up its branches. They awaited our coming and they began teetering the tree toward the trail, until our party got in the very narrowest spot. They then pulled with might and main and the great tree came cashing down upon us. Had I not happened to see it tottering just before it fell, and shouted long enough for us to make some preparation, we would all have been buried beneath it, crushed to death, a bleeding mass of bone and muscle."

Trent's face was a study in surprise.

"You are right, Bob," he said. "It is plain that there was a conspiracy to murder us."

"But who is behind this," questioned Hunt. "Who is there that would have interest enough in you or I to kill us?"

Trent shook his head.

"They are not after us," he said with great significance.

"After the Indians?"

"Certainly not."

"Then Grace Hopewell is the only one left in the party."

"She is the one I mean."

"What?"

"Yes. I mean that she is the one this fearful plot is directed at—she is the one that it was hoped the tree would fall upon."

"Oh, you must be mistaken. Who would want to murder a young, sweet girl, who can not in her short life have been in touch with any chain of events that might lead to an attempt to kill her."

"I know my idea seems silly, but I am convinced that I am correct."

"We had better ask Grace Hopewell if she knows of anyone that would wish to destroy her."

"On your life, no. Do not say a word of our suspicions to her. After all, we may be wrong. Your duty out here in looking over the timber lands may be behind this attempt. Timber thieves have been busy here for years. As we have agreed to let Grace go with us to Fort Marais, whither we are going on timber work we will just say nothing, but will charge ourselves with the duty of protecting her to her journey's end. On the road, if this be an attempt at assassination of the girl, other attempts will be made."

Trent saw the justice and wisdom of Hunt's plan.

"It's the best way," he said. "You are quite right. It may all be just a suspicion on our part. But I wish I had not urged the girl to join our party."

"Oh, that is all right," replied Hunt. "How could you help it? She was anxious to get to Fort Marais at once. The stage-coach over the stage line between Fort Assiniboine and Fort Marais only runs every two weeks, and she could not go by the daily Pony Express rider route, you see. He only carries himself and the mail in his packet on his body. He makes a trip each way every day, and so she wrote that when she had discovered that you were going to make up a party to travel to Fort Marais, that she would ac-

company us, and told her Canadian friends to expect her by the end of the week with us. I don't see as you can blame yourself for allowing her to come with us."

"Anyway she is here, and we must protect her."

"Of course."

"Do you know anything about the early life of the girl?"

"Sure I do. She is a good sweet girl, born near Fort Assiniboine. I knew her father and mother; her father was in the timber business."

"He was?"

"Yes. He and his brother-in-law were together in their younger days quite noted timber men."

"When the father and mother of Grace died she went to Fort Assiniboine to live with some distant relatives. I fancy her father's estate did not pan out well, and since she became a young woman she has been teaching in the Fort's Indian school."

"And having made quite a record as a teacher has been given an offer of a much better situation at Fort Marais, whence she is now bound in our charge."

"Yes."

Trent and Hunt having by this time cleared off a path so that the party could proceed on its way, were hurrying back to the horses when they met Deer-Horn walking toward them.

His impassive face was a shade less impassive.

"Ugh!" he said with the usual Indian salutation. "I get news."

The two men exchanged glances. They were not surprised when Deer-Horn led them away about fifty feet from the trail.

There in the soft earth could be plainly seen the tracks of feet.

They all pointed toward the tree which had so narrowly escaped crushing the party.

Bob Hunt went down on hands and knees to examine the tracks.

"Indians. They wore moccasins," he said simply.

"The assassins after Grace Hopewell are Indians," cried Trent.

Hunt nodded.

As he spoke a shot sounded far to the left. It rang through the ears of the party like the knell of doom.

A long howl of rage and fear came drifting along on the summer breeze.

"Wolves! Timber wolves," cried Hunt. "They are pursuing us."

The uncanny howl of the great beasts came nearer and nearer.

"To horse," cried Trent. "The ferocious timber wolves are on our trail."

CHAPTER IV.

A PONY EXPRESS RIDER'S WORK.

Standing five feet and one inch in his neat high topped boots, and weighing one hundred and eleven odd pounds, dressed, Gus Baxter, Pony Express rider for the Frontier Pony Express Line, was a man in a hundred.

Baxter was about the last man of the service that only a few years ago, before the iron-horse had crossed the great plains, was a Western institution.

He was one of those fleet messengers who sped across the continent from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California, going on horse-back nineteen hundred miles in eight days.

Was not that a wonderful thing for human flesh and horse flesh to accomplish?

But when the railroad made steel gridirons of the great Western plains, and cut the sage-brush country into ribbons, the Pony-Express rider was pushed backward with the old stage-coach, mud-wagon, and jerky, of the old time, until now, that part of the Golden West is only to be found on the North-West boundaries of British North America.

Save for the eighty miles of ride that Gus Baxter now took daily, there was no Pony Express rider in all the district he covered.

The regular mail coach that ran only between Forts Assiniboine in Montana, to Fort Marais, over the Canadian border only made the trip once in every two weeks.

There was much business between the two points, as around each Fort a town of several thousand people had grown.

Restive merchants from each side of the border had tried to get their respective governments to put on a quicker mail service which would force the mail coaches to be increased in numbers, but no result had been met with.

Finally, the merchants together started the Frontier Pony Express with Gus Baxter as its rider.

He was a wonderful little bunch of a man of spirit and endurance.

Winter or summer, through storm, or through pleasant weather, over the "Pony Express Trail," as it was called, Baxter went racing at top speed.

Eighty miles one way one day.

Racing back eighty miles the next day.

Seven days in the week.

How did he stand it?

He changed horses every twenty-to-twenty-five miles, less at times.

Thus the horses were kept fit; but how about their rider?

By all the laws of physicians, he ought to have broken down years ago.

But here he was daily darting as fast as his great thoroughbred running-horses could go now over his long stretch of eighty miles of level road; then along a fearful edge of a great precipice; again down steep mountain crags, to a level of splendid trail.

A great life. One of hurry, and bustle and hustle.

So, flashing along at speed, quite as fast as his magnificent horse could go, hurried Gus Baxter, on the morning after the death of Sam Turck.

At regular intervals the horse of the Pony Express Rider was changed.

He did not try to average more than a twenty-mile trip with one of his swift horses each day. Sometimes he would change horses every twenty-five miles when the going was good; often in a mountainous part of the trail, he changed his steed every ten miles.

Baxter's arrival at a change-horse station was a splendid picture of the olden days.

He would come crashing to the station where the station-keeper would be holding his new impatient steed in readiness with his eager nose pointed in the direction he was to go.

Then, on his weary horse, under whip and spur, the little rider would come flying down the trail.

Not waiting for his horse to stop, Baxter would fling himself from the panting animal, dragging his mail-

bag with him; would jump on the fresh horse with splendid agility, and with a shout would go tearing down the trail, again, freshly mounted, and with not a second of time lost in the transfer.

Horse and rider were bearing not an inch of superfluous weight.

Baxter's jacket was of deer-skin, cut extremely close.

His trousers were of moose-skin, and met a pair of top-boots, with a pair of aluminum spurs.

Baxter carried a single 45-caliber revolver.

His horse wore a saddle that was made for racing; just a suggestion of a saddle. Every bit of leather in bridle or on the saddle was made of deer-skin, to reduce the weight.

As it cost one dollar to carry a letter from Fort to Fort and no one could send more than five ounces in a single package, it meant money to patronize the line, although extremely thin paper, and cypher wording, economized in bulk or weight.

The little flat mail-pockets of thin leather were strapped under the rider's thighs, and would hold only about the weight and size of a boy's school-book.

So Gus Baxter was hurrying along at his usual breakneck speed and was getting ready to change from his weary horse to one at Sam Turck's, Bitterwater Gap Station.

With a whiz and a loud hail, he dashed down the hill toward the station expecting that as usual Sam would have the "change-hoss" standing ready before the station.

Instead of the horse awaiting him, Baxter saw a long thin whirl of smoke ascending from the ruined and blackened remains of the Bitterwater Gap Station.

Baxter pulled his horse out of his stride with one stalwart arm.

His big revolver came whirling to his other hand with the motion of the practiced shot.

Click! Click!

The deadly weapon came to a full cock.

Under control, but at a swift lope, not the mad pace of his mail-ride, Baxter hurried onward toward the station.

"Sam! Oh, Sam!" cried Baxter.

There was no answer.

A draft of wind took a tiny pointer-like shaft of smoke from where it was idly piercing the sky, and swept it over to a charred something that lay in the road side.

Baxter threw himself from his horse.

"It's poor old Sam Turck," the rider whispered as he knelt by the side of the charred disgusting remains of what had been the cheery old man such a short time before.

"Poor old Sam. Shack caught fire when he was asleep. Didn't wake up till he was all afire. Poor old —"

Baxter jumped back fully six feet dragging his snorting, astonished, rearing and plunging horse with him.

"Accident! No," cried Baxter. "Look there, see? There are bullet wounds in that burned corpse. Look at that rifle bullet mark in his head?"

Gus Baxter yelled the words as if hundreds of men could hear him.

"There has murder been done here! Murder!" continued Baxter.

But the trained Western-wits of the Pony Express rider were trained to think and act quickly.

He tied his horse to the nearest tree and began looking carefully around.

"No tracks," he thought. "That is suspicious. Someone has calculated this killing. They have obliterated all the tracks. They knew why they did that. They had cooked it up to kill poor old Sam—I wonder why—was it to rob him?"

As he spoke Gus Baxter hurried over to the wreck of the cabin.

The flames had done their work well. Only a heap of ruins remained of the station-house.

There was an odd scent in the air.

The nostrils of Baxter kept sniffing suspiciously.

"I've got it," triumphantly cried Baxter. "It's kerosene. It smells of kerosene."

He went into a brown study, forgetting his mail, his mission of speed, all in his wonderment.

"Whoever did this," cried Baxter, "planned it well. They sprinkled kerosene about here to give the flames greater speed."

Then he began poking idly among the embers.

Nothing but the black dirt from the embers were turned up by the stick for some time.

Then Baxter found that something retarded his pokings.

He dug deeper.

Then he gave a quick upward wrench.

Out came a strong manilla paper envelope, tied with a strong red bit of official looking tape.

"Ha! Ha!" cried Baxter as he pounced on the envelope. There in the handwriting of Sam Turck, which Baxter knew as well as he did his own, a name was written.

Baxter read the superscription, which was as follows:

MISS GRACE HOPEWELL,
Fort Assiniboine,
Montana.

Personal Only.

For several minutes Baxter stood lost in thought. "I know this girl," he finally said half aloud. "I know her well. But why is this letter for her? Why did this letter escape these flames? Does this letter tell the reason for the death of the poor old station-keeper?"

For half an hour Gus Baxter continued his search. Nothing resulted from it.

Not a bit of paper did he unearth. Not a single clue was found which would point to anything that possibly could lead to a solution of the reasons for the murder of the old man, came to light.

By one of those strange freaks of fate which seem always to be left behind by even the most calculating of criminals, there was just this envelope addressed to the girl, left behind as the nucleus for a search for the assassin.

It was the old, old story. No human brain can arrange any fixed condition of affairs to prove one innocent of crime, without also adding some trifling thing that would lead to one's conviction and punishment.

The wily Indians, Short-Ear and Dog-Foot, had arranged everything to distract attention from them, but one thing—this letter.

Baxter decided finally on his future course.

First, he would decently place the body of Sam Turck out of the road, where it could be claimed by those he intended to give the alarm to as soon as he continued on his way.

Then he fed, watered and rubbed down his weary horse, for he soon learned that the change-horses attached to the Bitterwater Gap station had been stolen.

"There is something about this crime," Baxter thought as he loped along but not at his usual speed, on the same horse which he had reached the station upon, "that makes me think if the Indians about here were on the war-path, that this was an Indian crime."

No sooner had he spoken the word "Indian" than it seemed as if two of them had sprung from the earth.

He saw ahead of him the evil face of a great crafty Indian peering at him.

He pulled his horse almost over-backward in his haste to stop.

He whirled about to dash back out of harm's way.

A second evil face of a swarthy Indian blocked his path in that direction.

And right across the road, about the height of a horse's head was stretched, in either direction, a rope; two snake-like lengths of rope.

A hill made it impossible to hurry around the ends of these ropes, on the one side; a steep declivity made the action impossible on the other side.

Gus Baxter, with the precious letter addressed to Grace Hopewell was hemmed in by the two Indian bandits, Short-Ear, and Dog-Foot.

Baxter raised his revolver ready to battle for his life.

CHAPTER V.

A DASH FOR LIFE.

"This way, Grace, this way. We may yet escape the timber wolves."

Hugh Trent howled these words at the top of his lungs, as he led the party of frightened travellers down the trail at a frightful speed.

The way was beset with numberless dangers.

The trail was rough, uneven, passing through the woods where at times it was only a bridle-path; at others it was quite wide, but always it was terribly rough.

A single stumbling horse and the rider would be torn by the gaunt gray wolves who were swiftly rushing behind at a wonderful speed.

The animals were running in a large pack, Trent could see.

There were some, merely the dusky timber wolf met with in Northern Montana. Others were the gray-white wolves of the Canada side of the border.

Trent could see their jaws dripping with froth, and red with their beating life, come hurrying along.

Trent led the way.

Next came Grace, followed by Bob Hunt, while behind whipping, spurring and yelling in terror, came hurrying the two Indians, Deer-Horn and Sun-Mist.

The speed made by the party was tremendous.

Whip and spur, and voice urged on the now thoroughly maddened, frightened horses.

"A dash for life," yelled Trent.

"Tracked by timber wolves," cried Hunt in return.

Thus the chase dashed onward.

At length a large wolf made his swift way from the pack.

It came ahead with wonderful long leaps and bounds. Now it was at the stirrup of Deer-Horn.

Calm as if sitting in his tepee the Indian's rifle switched by his nervous hand came back. The Indian almost resting on the back of his horse, while the

animal was charging forward, sighted along the rifle's barrel.

There was a livid burst of flame from the weapon.

The wolf leaped high in the air; he rolled over backward, while a fearful howl escaped from his snapping jaws.

The remainder of the pack tore down upon the dying animal. In the faint suggestion of a breath the pack pounced upon their fellow.

They tore him limb from limb, and in the few seconds it took for them to devour him, the beleaguered travelers gained perceptibly upon the fierce pack.

Then the chase was continued.

"We can not keep up this pace forever," shouted Trent to Hunt.

"Keep it up as long as you can, and then make stand and fight it out," replied Hunt.

A tawny colored she-wolf next tried to snap at the heels of the flying horse carrying Grace.

She screamed in wild terror.

Trent let his revolver give tongue.

Under his steady aim, wolf after wolf rolled hither and thither, dying with terrible howls of pain and rage.

Each shot was made with the horses at top speed.

It was a beautiful exhibition of marksmanship.

Grace was, fortunately, all during her childhood fond of riding. She clung to her steed with magnificent spirit. She lifted the beast with rare discrimination over the hard spots. She rode astride in true border fashion.

Grace wore a short jacket of brown corduroy with a short skirt of the same durable material, high boots, with spurs on each heel.

In her hand she carried a riding whip, and when the occasion demanded gave use to both means of urging her horse forward.

For two miles the chase continued. Pursued and wild howling pursuers raced ahead in an awful battle for death or life.

Soon the weapons of the party had been fired so often that ammunition was scarce.

Each man had fifty shots in his cartridge belt, but with a pack of five hundred wolves even as carefully as the men had aimed, and the numberless wolves that had died under their fierce attacks, there were still uncounted hosts racing after them.

"Deer-Horn," cried Trent. "Unstrap some of the provisions and throw them to the wolves. It may stop some of them for a moment."

Deer-Horn did as directed.

But the respite was only momentary.

"I am afraid they will get us," at length Hunt yelled.

"Do not give up yet," cried Grace in return. "Make one more effort to escape."

As she spoke the party with a great speed-burst darted out of the over-hanging woods.

There, right ahead, lay an abandoned hut of some hunter.

With the determination born of the stress of the moment, the party rushed toward the frail shelter.

Trent flung himself from his horse with a reckless disregard of life and limb, led the animal into the door of the hut, grasped the bridle of the horse Grace rode, lifted her from her seat with one hand, while the other led the animal into the hut.

Behind came the rest of the party, and in twenty

seconds, the entire weary party of travelers, horses, men and women were within the hut, and with a clang its heavy door was swung shut by Hunt, just as the nose of the leading animal struck against it. The wolf snorted and howled in grievous pain.

"Safe," cried Hunt.

"Safe at last," answered Grace.

The Indians took the entire matter as if rushing away from a dangerous pack of wolves was quite a usual occurrence.

But Trent scratched his head in wonder.

"We are safe," he said, "but old chap, we are pretty well cooped up here in this place. There isn't much room for any of us, and well, the first thing to do is to tie our horses so they won't plunge about and trample us under foot."

Trent led the animals to a far end of the hut. He tied them to one of the timbers and set the two Indians at work in rubbing them down.

Then he turned to Hunt and signaled him to walk apart with him.

"This hut will keep the wolves out, will it not?"

"Yes. I have examined the timbers. They will withstand any onslaught the wolves can make."

"But we can't get out, can we?"

"Not unless we want to be eaten alive by the wolves."

"I am not very tender. I would give any wolf indigestion," laughed Trent. "But I don't like to be cooped up here."

"Better be cooped up here than to be fighting for life out there."

"Very true, but I can not understand how such a pack of wolves got together here. There hasn't been such a pack heard of in years."

"Neither can I. If it was mid-winter I might understand how wolves would run in packs. Hunger would make them. But here in summer, why are they in this big pack?"

"I do not understand it myself. Wolves singly or in twos or threes, almost never attack men. But in packs they are dangerous."

"Do you know I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"These wolves did not get into this big pack alone by themselves."

"What?"

"I am sure of it."

"I am at a loss to see what you mean."

"There is some human agency behind this."

"Oh, pshaw, nonsense man, your brain is turning with the dangers through which you have passed."

"No it is not. I insist."

"What human agency could be behind the attack upon us by the wolves, my boy."

"Indians. Do you remember the shot we heard just before we saw the wolves?"

"This takes me off my feet. Better tell me all you suspect."

"You know there is little doubt that Grace was the focus for the fall of the big tree?"

"Yes, I grant that. She is the one the unseen forces are trying to murder."

"Did you stop to think that right on top of that dastardly, but unsuccessful attack on her, we are suddenly pursued by this band of fierce wolves?"

"Well no, I hadn't stopped to think of that."

"Then think. Now there is, we Western men know, no danger from a few wolves."

"None whatever."

"But get the wolves moulded into a pack, and the first party of travelers they meet, they will attack."

"Every boy in school knows that."

"It seems to me we can plainly see from what we know of the situation, that some human agency has silently been driving these wolves from parties of two or three into a great pack, and have further been narrowing a great circle around us, so that by the time the pack was formed, the wolves would sight us, and then it was a sure thing that emboldened by numbers they would attack us."

Trent and Hunt studied long and carefully over this phase of the perilous condition they were in.

Trent was the first to break the silence.

"I am beginning to think you are right. There is Injun deviltry and wile behind this attack by the wolves," he said. "They were driven together by a band of Indians. These Indians are the same ones that felled that tree. They are on our trail. They will never give up until they kill Grace Hopewell."

"Or are killed themselves," replied Hunt. "I am going to make it a point of duty to kill the Indians before they can kill Grace or us either. It's been some time since I laid down a full gun for any red-devil of an Indian that walked this earth."

"I am with you, my boy, but you know we are a bit out of the picture. The Indians know where we are and who we are; we don't know where the Indians are, or who they are."

"I don't care. I am not going to give up quite yet. Get some ammunition out of the pack-horse luggage. Get Sun-Mist and Grace to get us something to eat, feed the horses. Then we will talk about the future. I never could plan anything on an empty stomach."

The reasoning was so obviously the only real thing to do, that in a few moments, the entire party was busy getting something to replenish the strength of man or beast.

Outside the howling of wolves could be heard.

Through a hole he made in the timbers by digging out the adobe or plaster of mud, that was chinked in between the roughly hewed logs, Trent had a clear view of the wolves.

There were hundreds in the pack he saw.

They made an uneasy, snarling, dangerous guard that prowled about the hut, but with the suspicion of their kind, kept away at a respectful distance, evidently fearing a trap.

"They do not dare to make an attack," remarked Trent.

"No," replied Hunt. "The wolf hates the unknown. He scents danger when Man gets away from him and under cover. There is not much danger from an attack, I think."

Trent next examined the interior of the hut.

It was, he saw, a large single room, probably twenty feet square.

It was a hunter's hut, without question.

It had been made of rough timbers but had probably been occupied in winter by some person, because it was tightly chinked in with adobe, and an old shoot-iron stove stood in one corner.

Several high bunks were built along the sides for sleeping places.

There was a table made of a stump of a large tree in the center of the room.

The hut had been occupied a good deal, Trent was sure, because the ground was trodden hard as if from the friction of many feet.

"Do you know anything about this hut; that is, do you know whom it is owned by," Trent asked of Hunt.

"No. There are many of these places through the woods, I have found. In the hunting season many trappers build these huts, and sometimes they stay out all winter trapping and hunting, and sell their winter's work at Fort Marais. I think we are just about out on the Canadian border here. I should not wonder if I found this hut is on Canadian soil."

Trent, who was of an investigating turn of mind, saw that near the top of the hut were several narrow slit-like places to give light, and which were too small for any animal larger than a kitten to enter.

"We are perfectly safe here, save the question of water. We have plenty of provisions in our pack. We will not starve. But we may get very thirsty."

"There is a spring right here within ten or fifteen feet of the rear door of the hut," Grace cried.

She had been investigating on her own hook and had made this discovery.

"Howl on ye wolves," shouted Trent, as this discovery had placed them beyond all danger of a water-famine.

"We are certainly snug here," cried Hunt.

"If we can hit on a plan for getting water. The wolves will not attack us when we are all together in the house, or hut," said Trent, "but I am not so sure that any one person, or for that matter, all of us can go out without fear of an attack."

Deer-Horn had been grunting meanwhile in Indian dialect to his wife Sun-Mist.

He drew near when he heard Trent speak.

"Want water?" Deer-Horn asked.

"We do. We want it very much," replied Trent.

"Ugh!" stolidly replied the Indian. "My woman she go get water."

Grace burst into a peal of laughter.

"You ungallant savage," she said merrily. "The idea. Here we are all afraid to go out, and this Indian offers to sacrifice his wife in the attempt."

Deer-Horn shook his head.

"No danger," he growled. "Wife no get hurt. I show you how Indian woman get water for tepee, when wolves big pack, howl, and howl outside. Ugh!"

"I think the noble red man is about to give his white brother cards and spades and win the water game," remarked Bob Hunt.

"Shall we let him try?" asked Trent. "I for one am willing, but I do not want him to sacrifice his wife."

"I all right," interjected Sun-Mist. "I no fear."

So the Indian woman was told to go ahead and get water for the very thirsty crowd of weary people.

To the surprise of everyone, Deer-Horn began quietly unpacking the cooking implements the party had designed for cooking, as it would take several days to make the journey.

Deer-Horn selected from the pack a couple of frying-pans.

"What you going to do, Deer-Horn?" asked Trent.

"Going to fry a wolf?"

Deer-Horn grunted.

Next he selected a long bit of wood with a gnarled end.

He handed the stick of wood and a frying-pan to his wife, taking a second piece of wood and a frying-pan for himself.

"Give Sun-Mist water can," Deer-Horn grunted.

Hunt handed the Indian woman the large tin receptacle used about camps in which to hold water.

The two Indians then hurried to the rear door of the hut, ten or fifteen feet from which was to be found the spring filled with cool water.

Deer-Horn boldly threw open the door.

A chorus of wild howls greeted his ear.

The moment the door was open both Indians began beating with their sticks on the two frying-pans.

The din was ear-splitting.

The wolves gave frightened howls and rushed back toward the forest.

In a breath Sun-Mist dropped her frying-pan, made a leap for the spring, while her husband kept up the incessant tom-tom like noise.

The woman filled the can with sparkling water; rushed back to the hut, and was in the door, which her husband closed with a crash, just as a great wolf who had recovered his wits, snapped vainly at her heels.

"There," cried Deer-Horn, "Heap water!"

Sun-Mist returned the frying-pans to their pack without a word of enlightenment.

"Wolf heap 'fraid," said Deer-Horn. "He no like trap. One man, one wolf outside, no danger, wolf afraid; three men, ten wolves, men better get 'fraid. Wolves eat up quick. Wolves 'fraid dis place one t-r-r-ap. Keep way. Wolf 'fraid Indian woman tom-tom 'nother t-r-r-ap. Wolf run back. Woman get water. Wolf see woman, get no 'fraid, try eat woman. Woman she jump back for wolf getting over 'fraid. Ugh!"

This was the longest speech Deer-Horn had made in his thirty years of life; he never was known thereafter to any friend, to make quite as long a one again.

"Deer-Horn seems to me to understand wolf nature better than we do," remarked Trent. "He knows that a wolf will keep away from the unknown for fear of a trap. The wolf is the most suspicious of animals. Hence, until the wolves had analyzed the appearance of Sun-Mist, and the noise made by the beating of the frying-pans, the woman was safe. Before she had got back to the house the wolves had got over being afraid, and snapped at her."

"We might make this fact help us to escape," thoughtfully replied Hunt. "I hate to stay here very long. It means that we are trapped ready for the Indians to attack us, if we are right in thinking that the Indians are behind this latest way of killing us."

"It's a fine subtle Indian way. Eaten by wolves, would mean no suspicion that the Indians had killed us."

"I am still convinced that there is much that is hidden behind this trouble we are having on our journey. What should have been a simple proposition of traveling by day, and camping by night of a party on its way from one peaceful point to another, has ended in a dash for life."

Trent winked.

"We are not dead yet," he remarked. "What I want first is to get a peep at the savages who are behind this outrage, if it is as you suspect an attempt

at murder by savages—well, we shall see, sooner or later, what is behind it all."

While Trent was talking he gave a loud cry and stopped.

"Look outside. Look!" he cried.

One of the fierce sudden Montana storms was sweeping down from the higher mountains, with a wonderful violence, the rain falling in torrents and the mountain soon being a great waterfall.

"It's hailing," cried Grace, a few moments later. "Look, some of the hail-stones are as large as loaf-sugar!"

"That is not unusual way up here in these mountains. Hail-storms seem to be a part of every storm. But they disappear quickly, and do not hurt summer growth of vegetation."

"There does not seem to be frost in the hail-stones, I have noticed" put in Grace.

But Bob Hunt gave a loud yell of pleasure.

"Saved! Saved!" he cried like a mad man as he capered about and swung his hat high in air.

The others stared at him in wonderment.

"Hey, Deer-Horn, blindfold and hobble the horses, quick."

"What are you thinking of? Has danger crazed you?" in wonder asked Trent.

"Lead the horses on that great raft-like boat there, that game-boat," added Hunt to Deer-Horn, but not paying the slightest attention to what Trent was saying. "Hurry up before that hail melts. See, the ground is a foot thick in the hail stones, and further, the entire mountain side is slippery with the torrential rain that came ahead of the hail stones."

The Indian complied at once with his orders.

At one side of the hut was a great boat-like affair, with great wood runners, used, evidently, by hunters, on which to move great game-like bear, deer, antelope and animals of size from distant points where they were killed, to the hut.

"That game-boat is just the thing," Hunt went on. "Sometimes hunters will have several bears, a dozen deer, and no end of small game. A horse and this boat will bring the game to camp. This boat and no horses drawing it is going to save our lives to-day."

While he talked Hunt had taken several blankets from the pack horse.

These he twined on a frame work of hastily put together sticks, making a rude sail-like affair.

"He has gone mad," muttered Trent to Grace.

"Hobble the horses, front and hind feet. Blindfold them. Quick, that is right. Now throw and rope them," said Hunt to Deer-Horn.

A lariat soon threw each horse on his side, where he was firmly strapped to the game-boat, with his eyes blindfolded and his legs securely fastened so that all were helpless in spite of some struggles at first to escape.

"Now Grace, take that revolver of mine—here it is—and the moment we get into the open, you just shoot at the wolves like mad. Trent, give Sun-Mist your gun. She will do the same. Now everybody catch hold of the ropes on this boat. Now, all together. Yo, heave, oh!"

With a great strong pull the boat rushed through the door which Trent had opened out into the keen air which had become quite chilly from the storm.

As soon as the runners touched the hail stone snowy

surface of the ground, the boat dashed toward a part of the grizzly pack of wolves.

The strange sight awed the wolves for a moment.

Then they gave back, all save one; a great brute who charged the boat at whirlwind speed.

Flash! bang!

The great revolver carried by Grace sent a shot through the wolf who leaped in the air dead.

Pop! Pop! Pop!

The lighter caliber weapon of Sun-Mist with regular beat poured its lead into the other wolves.

The animals died in dozens.

The noise frightened back the pack and then with a screech that could be heard a mile, Trent, Deer-Horn, and Hunt pushed the sled forward right over the tremendous precipice that led to the great cleared valley ten miles below. The rocky sides of the precipice bore no vegetation.

Hunt and the other men jumped on the boat as it slid past them, held up by the hail stones as if it had been mid-winter, instead of summer, and unfurled his blanket-sail which caught the wind.

The boat sagged sideways with the propulsive force of the wind behind it.

Then with the speed of an arrow, it flashed down the mountain side faster than any race-horse ever went, faster than any steam locomotive ever was driven; right down the terrible precipice whose jagged rocks, deep gullies, and fearful break from forest and plain seemed to be hurrying forward to engulf them in a dreadful death.

Grace looked around her after the first second of the horrible downward rush.

"Where is Trent?" she screamed. "He has fallen from the boat. He is back there struggling with the wolves."

"We can not save him," cried Hunt. "I almost fear that we are also doomed to death."

He spoke well.

Right ahead there loomed up before the flying game-boat with its living freight of tired people, a canyon, or fissure in the mountain side, at least fifty feet across.

If the game-boat ran over into this fearful fissure in a trice all would be hurled hundreds of feet to death on the rocks at the bottom of the terrible gulf.

"We are lost," cried Grace as she covered her face with her hands and cowered down to the bottom of the flying boat.

The queer craft neared the precipice with tremendous speed.

CHAPTER VI.

GUS BAXTER'S GREAT LEAP.

Gus Baxter, Pony Express Rider, hemmed in as he was by two Indian bandits, Short-Ear and Dog-Foot, had been too often in positions of extreme danger to flinch at the sight.

Although the trail was narrow and the danger of toppling over down the mountain side to instant death, was great Baxter did not hesitate a moment.

No circus-rider ever made a horse go through such a succession of leaps and bounds, than did Gus, the Pony Express rider.

He spurred his animal until it leaped in the air as if going to fly. He jerked its bridle until its poor jaws were bleeding; but the animal as a result whirled about in a circle, kicking up a great cloud of obscuring dust and making even his trained rider dizzy.

"Neither of those Indians have much of a mark to fire at," Baxter thought, this being the object of his making his horse take such mad plunges.

Short-Ear and Dog-Foot were non-plussed.

They could not get a shot at Baxter, because they saw he was a mark that was sure to be missed, although they might hit his horse most any time.

A desperate man lying along side of a dead horse is a hard man to fight; and the two bandits had no wish to face such a proposition; for while the road or trail was lonely and little traveled, yet there was the chance of some one coming, and neither of the Indians cared to face the possible exposure a stranger might bring them.

Short-Ear, for the purpose of disguising himself, had painted his face a hideous solid mass of vermilion, and wore his hair cut like a Sioux.

Dog-Foot had dressed like a peaceful Assiniboiné.

Each felt sure that Gus Baxter, if he escaped them, would not be able to identify them so that arrest might follow.

The two Indians hid behind convenient rocks as soon as they saw that Baxter was showing fight.

After awhile Dog-Foot crawled over to where Short-Ear was dodging about trying to get a clear shot at Baxter.

"Got to get Baxter," whispered Dog-Foot. "Did you see him take letter out of burnt sticks at Bitterwater Gap station?"

"Sure. Got to kill him. If he escape he ruin all. We get caught. We get quick hanging. Kill him!"

The Indians then separated bound to not let Baxter escape.

They knew their danger if they did.

Baxter, who was watching his chance, threw himself sideways along the shoulder of his horse, thus placing the animal between him and the bandits.

As soon as Gus, holding on by one arm, and hand, had pushed his head and other arm under the horse's head, he took quick aim and fired.

Ping!

The revolver bullet went flying toward Dog-Foot.

The Indian was pretty far away for a revolver to carry, but the lead conical bullet managed to strike the red man on his wrist, and Dog-Foot hurried to cover like a rabbit with a great howl of anger and pain.

The bullet, however, unfortunately for Baxter, had not strength of force enough to penetrate the savage's hide; but it struck Dog-Foot a painful enough blow to keep him out of the fight for some time.

Then Baxter with one enemy out for a moment, put into play a general firing of his revolver at the place where he suspected Short-Ear was hiding, Baxter then whirled his horse in the direction of Fort Marais, gave a scream of triumph, and dashed down at the rope which barred the trail with the rush of a tornado.

Short-Ear was filled with glee.

"We got him," he cried to Dog-Foot. "Rope tied fast. Rope make he fall off horse backward. Horse go on. We kill him now easy."

Dog-Foot's eyes gleamed with malice and satisfied revenge when he heard Short-Ear's words.

Sure of the success of their strategy the Indians waited without an attempt to send shots after Baxter.

"No shoot. We got him sure. Use knife," counselled Short-Ear.

But the two bandits found themselves out-witted with an ease and celerity truly maddening.

The moment he reached the rope, which he clearly saw, Baxter reined in his splendid English hunter, and put him directly for a high jump at the taut rope.

The intelligent animal obeyed the demand of his rider like magic.

His forelegs darted up in the air; his powerful hind quarters gave a wonderful writhing jump, and with the ease of a bird flying over a house, the magnificent horse cleared the rope by one of the finest jumps ever made by an animal; took a few cat-like steps as he came down, on the other side, whirled into his great long, lope, and with the magnificent speed of the Arabian of the desert from which came his running powers, and the grit of the trotter, his dam, of many a race track, flew around a turn in the road.

On the animal's back a tiny bunch of muscle, nerve, and dash, called Gus Baxter, laughed and yelled and sang, as the great horse, his eyes flashing fire, long streams of white foam flowing behind him, whirled along toward Fort Marais, bearing the mail for the Fort and the precious package addressed to Grace, still safe in the custody of the Pony Express rider.

Behind on the mountain side two bandits raged, and swore and yelled and stormed in futile anger.

Gus Baxter kept his horse going for miles and miles. The narrow trail sounded hollow under the maddened animal's feet. But he gave it no hope of rest.

He proposed to make up lost time and get the Pony Express mail into Fort Marais, even if the gallant beast died under him, when he had gained his mission.

Baxter had just whirled about the foot of a steep mountain, when the most startling, unique, yet terrifying thing he had ever seen happened.

For several miles he had been drenched with a heavy rain-fall, but which had soon turned to a great fall of hail stones. This was not at all unusual even in summer for he was now high up above the sea level, at the top of Bitterwater Gap, where the trail crossed the Great Peak, one of the tallest of the Rocky mountains thereabout, and whose head was always topped in virgin snow.

Even in July with the hot sun beating down upon the Great Peak, there had been apparently no lack of snow when a storm raged there.

Nearly every rain storm, Gus knew, at this altitude ended in a great hail storm.

So Gus pressed forward just reining in his horse a trifle so he would not slip, but paying no attention to rain or hail.

But out of the mountain there came a wonderful sight.

Slipping, tearing, hurrying down the mountain side, came a great boat.

Gus pulled up, "The Captain," his horse, quick.

He himself nearly fell off his animal at the eerie view he had spread before him.

On the great boat, which plunged through the hail-stones, dashed over rocks, ran through great hilly places, jumped over apparently inaccessible canyons, was a party of people; whether white or red he could not see—and yes, there were horses hobbled and tied upon the boat.

A great blanket-like sail was bellying to the wind.

The boat sped forward at a mile a second gait, it seemed to the awe struck Baxter. His eyes lay on his cheek: His mouth was wide open with his emotions.

His horse snorted and backed as if he had seen a visitor from the evil world.

"They are headed for that precipice," yelled Gus in terror, as he watched the course of the descending boat. "They will dash into it and be killed."

The boat was now only about a mile away.

In a few seconds it would be dashed down the great canyon, which here was fifty feet wide.

Gus almost whimpered in his sorrow, but he knew the party on the boat was beyond human aid.

The boat neared the precipice; it slid fearfully; it seemed to see its own danger.

"There she goes, down, down to an awful death," stammered Baxter.

But he was mistaken, for the great boat, seemed to lift herself right in air, and make a great forward bound.

In the breath of a babe, the boat skimmed over the terrible precipice, whisked over the trail, down to the river, where after a three or four hundred feet run on the level snow-like surface made by the hailstones it came to a stop.

Baxter tried to see who was aboard the boat, for he saw forms running about the craft, but he could not distinguish faces.

So he carefully hurried his horse over to the boat.

A man was trying to resuscitate a fainting woman.

The man turned around.

"It's Bob Hunt!" cried Baxter.

"It's Gus Baxter," replied Hunt almost in the same breath.

Grace Hopewell then opened her eyes from her fainting fit.

"Where are the wolves," she said.

"We left them miles and miles behind," replied Hunt. "We have escaped from them."

"Is Hugh Trent dead?"

"I fear he is. There was no hope of saving him when he fell from our boat," Hunt replied bravely. "No power on earth could stop our swift descent down the mountain side. Even if we could stop, we would not have been able to help him. Poor old chap. I hated to see him fall to his death, but it is fate."

Grace's eyes were filled with tears but she was too much of a frontier girl to show much emotion even when a good friend had perished, and she soon, with Sun-Mist and Deer-Horn, began to help unhobble and remove the blindfolds from the horses.

The animals were soon ready for use again, and leaving the boat which had saved them where it had landed, the party, with Gus Baxter, hurried back toward the trail, and began the journey once more to Fort Marais.

As they jogged along at a smart pace, the Pony Express rider and Hunt talked over matters as to future movements.

Gus, for reasons of his own, thought better not to say anything about the letter addressed to Grace which he had dug from the embers of Bitterwater Gap station-house.

He thought the letter was purely personal to Grace as it was so marked and he had no wish to trench on the privacy of the words written by dead Sam Turk probably the last thing he ever wrote, which were, "Personal Only."

When he told Hunt of the frightful murder of Turk, Hunt gave a loud cry of surprise.

"And the station-house destroyed by fire?" ques-

tioned Hunt as Baxter got further into his grewsome story of the discovery of the body of Turk. "I tell you, this is Injun work. No white man would assassinate out here in this country. White men fight fair out here. Red men are the ones that do the cowardly tricks."

"That is so," answered Baxter. "But why are the Indians out for Sam Turk, or his friends? Sam had no money. He was a poor old, broken down man, who was glad for the living that the station-house gave to his declining years, with no property that anyone ever heard of."

"I know all that. It looks as if I was crazy to think that somewhere or other there is a plot on foot, but just why I do not know. I am sure of this one thing, and that is that we all are being followed by someone who is after our lives; whether it is due to something we know or something we have, I don't know. But in my opinion there is assassination in the very air about us."

Baxter's eyes grew big with wonder.

"Gee, I'd hate to feel that way," he said. "I aint going to say that I am a blinky coward, nor am I going to lay claims to being a brave man, but I will say, that while I will fight my weight in wild-cats any day, I'd be scared worse than any tender-foot girl, just West out of an Eastern boarding school, if I thought the way you do, that I was liable any time to be a victim of an assassin."

"I know how you feel, but I am sure I am right."

Baxter then detailed his terrible experiences with the two Indians near the Bitterwater Gap station, and how narrowly he escaped assassination.

"By Jove!" said Hunt. "Could you not identify those savages?"

"Not a bit. Each was so well disguised that I haven't the slightest idea who either was."

"They are a couple of pretty desperate bandits," cried Hunt, "to go to so much pains to kill you. Why should they want to murder you, at that?"

Having said nothing about his precious letter to Grace, Baxter hardly knew how to reply.

"Anyway," he side-stepped, "they didn't get me."

"Thanks to your quick brain, and your fine horse," replied Hunt.

"What do you think about Hugh Trent?" put in Baxter finally.

"He didn't have a ghost of a chance for life, in my opinion. The wolves had been milled into a pack by some of the Indians we feel sure are back of all our troubles. They attacked us, that being why they were milled by the Indians. Trent fell right directly in their path, and he must have been killed by the wolves immediately."

"It was a sad fate," replied Baxter.

Sun-Mist, who with Deer-Horn, was riding ahead of the two speakers at this point pulled in her horse.

"Man coming. See, he got big gun."

As the Indian woman spoke she pointed down the trail.

A figure was to be seen running toward the party swiftly waving a revolver.

"Get ready for that fellow," cried Hunt to Baxter.

"Look! The man is going to shoot at us."

Baxter shaded his eyes with his hands to get a good view of the running man.

"Come on," he cried to Hunt.

He dug his spurs into the side of his horse and dashed madly toward the figure.

Hunt and his party hurried after him.

CHAPTER VII.

SIDNEY HOLT RECEIVES A SHOCK.

Sidney Holt, rated as the millionaire president of the Montana Land and Timber Discovery Company, sat in his hunting lodge, a few miles from Fort Assiniboine, with an angry cloud on his usually serene face.

His lodge was as ornate in fittings as the home of many men in the vicinity who thought that he was too much of the child of good fortune and that he hunted more from the great easy chair on his wide front porch, than in actuality.

Holt cared not a whit for the opinion of anyone, but he did not like the long vista of a prison, with a gallows and a hangman at the end of a corridor, which the report of the Indian, Short-Ear, seemed to raise up for him, like an unquiet view of what might possibly happen.

"Do you mean to tell me that you have failed?" asked Holt of the Indian with an angry inflection in his voice.

Short-Ear bowed.

"So far we fail," he said, "Girl still alive. But we kill her yet before long. Dog-Foot he still on her trail."

"You ought to have killed her long before this. You have had three days to end her life in since I left you at your cave."

"No trouble to kill her. Do that any time. Trouble is to kill her and not get caught."

Short-Ear narrated his attempt to kill Grace Hopewell by the apparently natural method of the fall of the great tree.

"Good scheme," the Indian said after he had closed his tale, "but no win out."

Sidney Holt thought of the many "good schemes" he had entered which had ended in his determination to commit two murders so that he might get a firmer grip on his various business interests.

He also thought that possibly this last, crime-stained reach for his fortune might be his last; and his heart grew heavy.

But he had no other plan in view except the one that he had asked the bandits to perform and he knew he must placate the man before him, so that the Indian would fulfill his mission.

"Well better luck next time," Holt continued. "You tried hard. You say that Dog-Foot is still on the trail of the girl. Possibly by this time she may be dead."

A gleam of hatred swept over Holt's face.

If he could only know that Grace Hopewell had followed Sam Turk to death he knew that he would give twice the fifty thousand dollars that he had agreed to add to the twenty-five thousand paid for the death of the aged station-keeper.

"Well," Holt continued. "You can get the cash as soon as you earn it. It's not hard to earn it after all, for while you may have failed in the matter of the tree did you not have some other plan to work, besides that?"

Short-Ear told how he and his gang of bandits had with much care milled the white and brown-wolves of the timber into a great pack, and had urged them to

attack the Trent-Hunt party when they were by numbers ready to make the attempt to destroy the hated man-folk.

"What do you mean by the word 'milled?'" asked Holt.

"All band spread out in big circle," replied Short-Ear. "Each man keep ten or fifteen feet apart. Make great circle through woods. All ride r-o-u-n-d in circle. Wolves hear us. They rush to center of circle. We ride r-o-u-n-d and r-o-u-n-d in smaller circle bimeby. Keep making wolves get together in circle. Then we get circle smaller and smaller. Wolves now all together in center in pack. Then we open circle at end toward white party. We shoot all our guns. Wolves dash through part of circle not guarded. All wolves now run in big pack. Biggest wolves lead way. They fierce now; lots of wolves always ready to attack white folk. They see white party. Bing, eat white party up."

The cold-blooded ingenuity of the plan appealed to the dramatic side of Sidney Holt's mind.

He rubbed his hands with satisfaction.

"Surely such a great scheme ought to have won," he said.

Short-Ear shrugged his shoulders, and told of the splendid dash for safety of Trent's party when they were tracked by timber wolves.

He gave a vivid picture of the escape of Grace Hopewell and her gallant defenders by means of the game-boat, and narrated how Hugh Trent had fallen from the boat when it was in full sail down the awful mountain side.

"I hope he is dead," cried Holt with bitter vehemence.

"Guess he dead, all right," indifferently replied Short-Ear. "Dog-Foot and I look all over ground after we see Trent fall, when wolves bimeby go 'way. Nothing there. Wolves eat up man slick and clean. Leave no sign. I don't care if he dead. I don't care if he live. No money in him dead or alive for me."

"Well, you are doing very well," at length remarked Holt. "You can not play in such bad luck forever. You will win that money yet. How far are the party now from Fort Marais?"

"Fifty miles maybe. We get them 'fore they get to Fort."

"What else did you do?"

Holt got a severe mental jolt when Short-Ear told him of the finding of Gus Baxter, the Pony Express rider, poking about the embers of the burned Bitter-water Gap station.

"Found some paper?" gasped Holt. "What was in the paper? You don't know—why man you did not let Baxter get away with that paper?"

When he was told of the wonderful leap for life of Baxter on his English hunter, "The Captain," Holt's face was white and he was trembling with fear.

"That's bad news," he said, "awful news. You must get that paper that Baxter found. I will give ten thousand dollars extra in good gold if you return that paper to me."

"Good, very good," the bandit answered. "I get paper. I go now. You no fear, we get girl and paper."

"Where is your horse?"

"He staked out on hill mile off. I steal here on foot. No one see me."

The Indian hurried away as he spoke leaving Holt frightened to the core.

Holt knew now that he was not only struggling to save his fortune but that his life also was in the balance.

He had entered the easy road of crime only to find when it was too late, that he was in a thorny path.

"I must win now or my life is the forfeit. I can not lose. What is my fortune now to me, if I am discovered. A felon's death awaits me for it can now be easily traced to me as the instigator of the deeds of blood of the gang of Indians bandits. I must win. I will."

These thoughts followed one after the other through the dark recess of the mind of this inscrutable man.

He was never more dangerous than now. His fine talents were now forced by circumstances to bend themselves toward the entire extermination of every person that might betray him; and Short-Ear and his gang were never in more danger than they were from the moment that Sidney Holt began to see that he must fight not only for his fortune but for his life.

If Short-Ear, as he hurried over the level land toward Fort Assiniboine, had known all that there was to be known, he would not have been so gay and care free.

When Hugh Trent was flung from the game-boat on the crest of the great hill or mountain, through the cleared portion of which he had seen his companions whirl onward to safety and the valley below, he had given himself up for lost.

Yet, he was really, as it turned out, to figure in the terrible plans of the bandits in a manner that he did not even fancy; and which would have ended his career then and there, had the bandits understood.

The fall from the swiftly moving sleigh was about as dangerous for Trent as a fall from the swiftest passenger train in the world would be for an average man.

He rolled over and over as he touched the earth; his sprawling hands and his wide extended arms found no hold.

He bounded like a human rubber ball hither and thither, expecting that every moment would be his last.

With the desperation of a man in a fearful plight, Trent held on to his revolver.

Where he was going, he did not know; why he was slipping over the ground so fast, he could not understand.

He tried vainly to right himself; but he could not. He was a helpless victim of some unknown source.

After much effort Trent pulled himself to a sitting position.

His hands grasped something icy and cold.

"What is it?" his mind seemed to say, but in the awful speed with which he was being swept onward, Trent could not gather his thoughts together sufficiently to tell what it was that he grasped.

He saw that around him were many swiftly moving forms.

Were they men?

No—Great Heavens, they were wolves.

Everywhere on all sides Trent saw the dreadful forms of the wolves.

He was of them, with them, yet they made no attempt to attack him.

He could hear their howls of fear and rage.

He, the wolves in one vast company of swiftly moving shapes, were hurrying onward—but to what;

where were they flying in awful blood-stilling swift-ness?

Slowly the benumbed brain of Hugh Trent began to resume its natural function.

He sat up firmly grasping the shape underneath him.

He saw that he sat upon the trunk of a great tree. His hand was grasping a gigantic limb; his legs, in the same way that a drowning man at sea grasps the first bit of stable wood that floats by him, were twined about the tree trunk.

"I am being whirled down the mountain side on the crest of a fearful landslide," thought Trent.

He was right.

Where he had fallen from the game-boat the rain of the terrible torrential storm had loosened a large portion of the mountain, and he, the wolves, huge rocks and stones, trees uprooted by the giving away of the earth, with a fearful portion of sliding earth, was slipping at lightning speed down into the great valley in wild pursuit of the boat on which his friends were striving to reach a place of safety.

He, Hugh Trent, a man, but now merely an atom in the universal ruin of the wonderful land-slide, was hurrying to what seemed to be, his certain death.

No one who has not lived in the Rocky Mountains, or its foot hills, can realize what the frequent land-slides in that country after a sudden rain, can mean.

It is the ever present danger from the rocks, and eternal hills that seem to make up the backbone of America.

But Trent was a very brave man.

He was himself again, battling for life, when he found just the situation he was in; he tried hard to give direction to the tree on the surface of the madly rushing mass, but he could not do so.

He looked around at the wolves.

They were fast disappearing beneath the tumbling rocks. As he looked he saw a white wolf struck upon his back by a huge rock. The animal was a bleeding mass in a second.

Other wolves were seen vainly struggling to get out of the ruck, and everywhere about him, Trent saw the animals die by scores.

Such a slaughter he had never even imagined possible. But he knew he might be a crushed bleeding mass of mere bloody flesh in a second; but he knew that the great pack of wolves had met a merited doom.

Suddenly there came upon his ears the booming as if of an angry storm-swept sea upon a rock coast.

Trent saw that the land-slide was plunging down into a precipice, the one by the way, which his companions had cleared by such an almost miraculous circumstance.

Wolf after wolf, tree after tree, rock after rock, he saw go plunging over the depths to go grinding down to be covered by the swift rush of other trees, rocks, and earth that came behind it, like the swift resistless rush as the turbulent waters pause a moment and go into the great whirlpool of Niagara Falls.

Trent closed his eyes. He knew that in all human probabilities he had only a few seconds to live.

He felt the tree he grasped give a downward leap.

"I am going over the brink," he thought. He closed his eyes; he tried to form a prayer.

"What was this," he said to himself. "The tree is not moving. I am—"

Trent looked about him. As his pale lips tried to

form a word of thanksgiving, he saw that right on the crest of the awful precipice, he was saved.

The tree had entangled itself in a century old hickory forest king; the splendid tree had withstood the rush of the landslide. It held the great tree on which Trent sat with its long branches.

Trent was saved.

In the twinkling of an eye, when to all outward appearances his life was forfeit to chance, Hugh Trent was snatched from death by the catching of the tree which chance had flung him upon, right at the brink of painful disaster.

For more than hour Trent lay still. He was too spent from his terrible ride to extricate himself from his position.

At length he tottered feebly down the mountain side. He was bleeding from many bruises; he was parched with a great thirst; his clothes were torn to tatters, his hunting boots were actually mere pieces of leather on his torn feet—but he was alive.

And through his frame there swept the glorious feeling that he was alive, a thinking, breathing, although painfully wounded man, alone in the vast wilderness about him; but alive, thank God, alive!

Limping along the dipping mountain, Trent saw right ahead of him, just beneath him, in his downward progress the forms of two Indians.

His first impulse was to hail them and ask for aid. But there came an inner feeling that there would not be anything but danger to himself in such a course.

A few feet ahead of him, when he discovered the two Indians, was a tall maple tree.

Its friendly branches invited him to a seat within its leafy limbs now drooping beneath the effects of the terrible hail-storm.

Seeing that the Indians were sure to pass underneath the tree, Trent hurried to a seat among the lower limbs of the maple, but high enough up its trunk to escape danger of being discovered.

As he had conjectured the two Indians soon reached the tree and sat down right beneath him, and where he could hear their conversation perfectly, to rest from their journey.

It was Short-Ear, and his bandit companion Dog-Foot.

Each one of the two Indians were known to Trent. He had seen them often hanging around the saloons where the law was braved, and the heavy fine for selling liquor to an Indian was not feared, at Fort Assiniboine.

Trent had thought the two men merely the usual kind of Indians that hang about the Fort; utterly shiftless and harmless, and he was by no means prepared for the startling revelations they were to make when talking together beneath his leafy shade; and which threatened terrible consequences to Sidney Holt, the millionaire.

"Darn hard luck," Trent heard Short-Ear say to Dog-Foot. "No get cash if we no kill girl."

"Why not stop foolish way trying to get wolves to kill girl. Why we not kill her."

"Old Holt, he say, no; kill girl, but don't get found out. That's why. Do you savez?"

"Yes, but we no get chance maybe to kill girl. Tree don't fall right. Wolves don't kill her. What you do, lose the cash?"

"No, no. Get cash at last. But try first to kill girl

by not doing it ourselves. There's other trees, and other wolves, in this place. Savez?"

"Why we want kill Grace Hopewell?"

When he heard these words Trent almost fell right into the center of the two bandits.

"Cause we no get cash from Holt, if we don't. I no care darn to kill girl; Holt he want her killed."

"White man queer man. No use killing Grace Hopewell. What Holt gain, eh?"

Short-Ear shrugged his shoulders.

"How I know?" he replied. "Why I care? 'Nough for me I get cash, when job is done."

The two Indians then began planning a further campaign against the pretty young woman under Trent's protection for the trip to Fort Marais.

For a moment Trent grasped his revolver. He had thought that two shots would end the plottings of the devilish bandits forever.

Then he remembered that if he killed the Indians he would remove all possible evidence that they might give that would incriminate Sidney Holt.

"Those red brutes are merely men who have no knowledge of good or evil," thought Trent. "They can not do more than try to kill Grace. I think that now we know of their devilish plot that we can not only keep them from killing Grace, but we can sift this mystery to the bottom, and we will see whether in this peaceful country, a man like Sidney Holt can plot the murder of an innocent girl."

But the Indians continued talking.

"Where we going to get Gus Baxter?" asked Dog-Foot.

"Same time we get girl."

"He suspect us, eh?"

"He know too much. He got papers, so I know, eh?"

"You mean the papers he dug out at Bitterwater Gap?"

"Yep."

"What in paper?"

"Don't know. Holt he say he add ten thousand dollars if we get paper off Gus Baxter."

"That good money."

"Yep. Buy heap fire-water. Red man like fire-water."

Both of the bandits laughed in unison, thinking of the numberless debauches they would have when they reached the golden reward, Holt was to pay them.

"How about Trent?"

"He no good white man. Got no orders to kill him."

Trent took off his ragged cap and made a low mocking bow in the direction of the bandits.

"Thank you kind sirs," he whispered. "I'm 'no good,' eh. I suspect I am to show you two plotters, and the man who is egging you on to these deeds of blood that I am 'some good,' some of these fine days. If I don't see you two Indians on the road to death, it will be because my name isn't Hugh Trent."

The bandits then took a long pull from a flask of their beloved fire-water, which Short-Ear carried.

"We must hurry now. Wait tonight. Then we kill girl and get papers."

With swift steps the two plotters hurried away.

For more than an hour Hugh Trent did not stir from his perch.

He was turning over in his mind the events of the fearful day of danger and trial, with the discovery of

the plot against the lives of Grace Hopewell and Gus Baxter.

Then he climbed stiffly from the shielding maple.

"Woe betide you, Sidney Holt," he sneered as he shook his fist with fierce menace at the sky. "I know now why you wish the death of Grace Hopewell. I know why you wish to have Gus Baxter murdered. You infernal villain I will thwart you yet. Now to find my friends if I die in the attempt."

Trent limped down the mountain side.

As he hurried along he saw right in front of him a man flying like the wind on a great black horse.

He waved his revolver.

"Who rides so fast like a thief in the night," he thought as he took a firmer grasp on his weapon.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HUNTED BECOME THE HUNTERS.

Gus Baxter rushed along the trail on his fine horse, intent on knowing just what the mysterious stranger ahead of him wanted.

"Who is this man who runs with staggering gait waving his revolver?" Gus thought.

Baxter had his own weapon in readiness to fire if the man was an enemy.

When he got nearer to the figure he gave the bridle of his horse a startled wrench.

His face was distorted with fear.

"A ghost," he cried. "It is Hugh Trent's ghost."

Baxter was about to wheel around and retreat, when the figure hailed him.

"Ghost, nit," cried the man, in the well known voice of Trent. "Don't be a donkey."

"You talk all right," replied Gus from the back of his trembling horse. "I never met a ghost before so I don't know whether they talk or not."

"I am no ghost," snapped Trent, "and if you don't come here and talk to me I will make a ghost of you."

As this was said with a threatening flourish of his revolver, Gus thought it wise to draw nearer Trent. He knew, according to all ghost stories, that if he shot at a ghost unless he used a silver bullet he would see his leaden messenger go right through the spook without hitting it.

So as he did not have a silver bullet handy Gus in his own mind decided that he had better talk with the ghost, rather than shoot at it or risk being shot by it.

"You know you can not be Hugh Trent alive, because he was eaten up by the wolves," Gus said, as he allowed "The Captain" to edge closer to the figure.

"You silly idiot," cried Trent. "Come here and feel my arm. Ghosts do not carry about good flesh and muscle, do they?"

Gus edged still nearer.

He felt carefully, but in a frightened way, of the strong right arm of Trent.

"You look all right to me," Gus at length remarked.

"But if you are not a ghost just explain will you, why you are not?"

There was so much severe judicial arraignment in the tones of Gus that Trent, way-worn as he was, bruised, hungry, and almost hopeless, lay down and laughed until his eyes were filled with tears.

"You never heard that a ghost was able to laugh, now did you, Trent?" entreated Gus.

All that Trent could do was to kick feebly when he heard Gus speak. Words had failed him.

After a time Gus became sure that Trent was still

in the flesh, and then he jumped from his horse, and made Trent mount him.

"You ride back and meet Bob Hunt and the others of the party who are just behind the point there," he said. "A man who has passed through what you have is a peach; he can not walk."

When Trent rejoined his party there were many congratulations showered upon him.

"You certainly were born to be hanged," cried Hunt. "No man ever passed through what you have, and lived, before."

Grace was equally glad to see the returned hero. Her face was mantled in a pleasing blush; her blue eyes showed her gladness, and thereat Trent was immediately plunged into a sea of delight.

"To bring these congratulations from you all again," he said. "I would ride on the crest of another landslide, and see more wolves die around me in the tempest that killed them, than I have done."

This speech made Grace blush more than ever, and the happy merry party proceeded on their way, with Hunt and Trent riding in the van and the remainder of their forces coming on behind at a good smart lope.

Trent as soon as he and Hunt were fairly out of ear-shot plunged at once to the subject that lay uppermost in his thoughts.

Hunt gave a loud whistle when he heard the terrible news of the wayfarer.

"Just as I feared," he said. "The bandits are after Grace."

"And it's up to us to protect her."

"Of course."

"Why, do you suppose, Sidney Holt has hired these bandits to kill Grace?"

"I do not know."

"I do."

"You do. Why?"

"There is some great money reason behind all this. Grace in some way stands in the way of Holt's possession of money."

"Can you fancy how?"

"I have an idea, but it is such a vague one that it seems to me I had better wait until I am sure that I am on the right track before I even advance my theory."

"Have you taken any steps to prove the truth of your theory?"

"Not as yet. But when we get to Fort Marais, I can prove it. It will require my sending word to Washington, much research, but I think in an averagely short time I can get to the bottom of it all, and will get to the motive that is behind Sidney Holt's wish to kill Grace."

"Will your investigations lead you to why he paid money to the bandits to kill Sam Turck?"

"Yes. I feel sure that the reason for the killing of Turck was the same that actuates Holt in his effort to have the bandits murder Grace."

"Holt is a dreadful scoundrel."

"He is that, and more than that; he is the kind of a man that is very dangerous out of his coffin. He has the brains to plot, and the money to pay for his plotting, and means to put his brains and his money together—that is a combination that we will find it hard to meet."

"Quite true."

"But we will meet it."

"How?"

"By becoming the hunter instead of the hunted."

"You mean to trap the bandits as they have trapped us."

"I do with the exception that we will succeed in our trap while they have failed in theirs."

"They are not through plotting yet."

"Nor have we begun plotting. We will meet their plots with counter-plots, and when we are through the nice little gang of bandits will be in jail, awaiting execution for their crimes, and we will have the satisfaction of knowing that—"

"Sidney Holt is in jail with the other miscreants."

"You never said truer words in your life."

The two men stopped talking at this juncture for ahead of them they saw that Grace had stopped and was awaiting them.

They hurried forward.

Grace was apparently excited by something.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Hunt.

"Nothing, possibly, but my imagination. It seems to me that I saw a man hurrying along in the creek-bend there."

"Go find who it is, Deer-Horn," commanded Trent. "If it is an Indian shoot him. It's time to quit our passive attitude. Anyway if you shoot the wrong man, it is only a dead Indian. What's the odds?"

Grace cried out in horror, and asked Deer-Horn not to kill an innocent Indian.

"Bosh," replied Trent. "There are no innocent Indians following us, Grace, you can rest assured of that."

Deer-Horn was off like the wind on his pony.

He made a beautiful picture.

All his sluggish manner was gone.

He rode a little pinto with no saddle; his bridle was a twisted bit of deer-skin, one end of which was passed through the animal's jaws, for no real Western Indian ever uses a steel-bit.

The semi-savage had thrown his long *serepe* to his wife when he started, and he wore a short tightly fitting jacket of soft deer-skin, which showed the great muscles of his chest and arms.

One red, strong hand, clutched his rifle.

The other held his bridle-reins close up to his chin. His legs were drawn up until his knees made a sort of peak; the real Indian way of riding, and he tore over the ground right down a steep declivity, into the creek bottom that wound about the sides of a tiny stream, now swollen by the storm into a turbulent river, with an astonishing dash.

"White men can ride," replied Trent when Grace asked him if the Indian would not kill himself, "but that Indian can ride better than we. He is as safe as a baby in its carriage. A white man would tumble horse and self down that steep in a jiffy. Deer-Horn will not be even scratched."

That Trent spoke truly was quickly evidenced.

Deer-Horn was flying like a bird down the long creek-bottom, taking great leaps like a steeple-hunter without a change in pace. How his little Indian pony made such speed, and overcome so great a stretch of rough riding was one of the wonders of the trip.

The savage finally disappeared in the distance.

Then there came from the direction in which he had vanished a dull boom.

"That's Deer-Horn's gun," cried Hunt. "It's an old fashioned muzzle loader. Our rifles, being car-

tridge carrying magazine guns would make a crack like a whip."

The party listened intently.

"Nothing further, eh?" at length said Hunt.

"Let us wait a few moments more," answered Trent. "We may hear something."

"No hear more shot," cried Sun-Mist with a superior air. "My man, he shoot. That 'nough. Other man can no shoot. My man get *him*. My man great warrior-Chief."

The joyful air of the proud Indian wife was quite like that of an American wife who proudly tells of her husband's business successes.

Grace marveled at the sight.

"White woman or red," she thought, "her man is the great warrior chief."

From the distance came in loud insistence the war-whoops of an Indian.

It soared on the air; the wild yell; the blood craze of a race never less the savage even after long association with the white race.

Sun-Mist, all savage woman in a moment, gave cry to the same wonderful yell.

"My man, great warrior-Chief," she cried. "Look."

A transformed Indian came riding back.

It was Deer-Horn, yet it was not Deer-Horn.

A frightful face seemed to have replaced the usual impassive one of the Indian.

All the perfidious, treachery of the Indian, in the days when he was all savage seemed to have lodged in Deer-Horn's countenance.

He was crying the battle yell of the Assiniboine Indians as he came along.

Across the fore-quarters of his pony he bore the form of another Indian.

The limp body, the head lying low and nodding like that of a tiny infant, the nerveless feet, all told the story of death.

"By George," cried Hunt. "He got the Indian. I only hope your order has not plunged us all into an arrest for murder, Trent."

Trent blinked.

"Gee," he said. "He sure did obey orders. Perhaps I spoke before I thought."

"It's an infernal bad practice to speak before you think, especially when you tell an Indian to shoot another."

Poor Grace was in a state of hysterics, and it took the united party to partially calm her.

Not wishing her to see the dead man close, Gus Baxter rode out to meet Deer-Horn.

The Indian after a few wild whoops of triumph, suddenly sank back to his old state of passivity.

The savage taint had come uppermost; it had been glutted in the blood of his enemy; he was now no longer a savage Indian; he was back to the tame imitation that the white-folk had made of him.

Trent and Hunt as soon as they calmed Grace rode out to where the body of the Indian lay.

"Turn him over so I can see his face, Deer-Horn," said Hunt. "It seems to me I know that chap."

The dead face was exposed to view.

"He got him through the head, see?" remarked Trent.

"Yes," replied Hunt. "I know this fellow. He is Wind-In-The-Cloud, a white man, a Squaw-man, who married an Indian girl, the sister of Short-Ear, and

about the dirtiest, meanest son-of-a-gun of a turn-coat that ever I knew."

"If he is one of Short-Ear's gang we need not fear much legal danger from the authorities of America."

"No danger there. We are on Canadian soil."

"Not much danger there, because all Canada out here knows this fellow ought to be killed. I have been after him for years. I think there is a warrant somewhere in the hands of the American Mounted Scouts for this fellow for murder."

"Say, aren't you chaps going to search him?" asked Gus Baxter.

"Search him," cried Trent to Deer-Horn.

The first thing that came to view was a roll of twenty dollar gold pieces.

"Where did this fellow get that cash?" questioned Baxter.

"There is easily a thousand dollars in that roll."

Hunt and Trent exchanged glances.

"Anything else on him?" asked Hunt.

Deer-Horn handed a letter to Hunt almost as soon as he had spoken.

It was tied with a red cord, written in a sprawling hand.

Hunt turned the letter over. His face was a study.

"Better read the letter, eh?" queried Trent.

The letter was addressed as follows:

FOR SIDNEY HOLT.

And this is what it said, as the three white men crowded around and hurriedly scanned it:

"Don't worry. We get her, to-night."

"SHORT-EAR."

"Well I will be—no I won't either. I guess we got in right when Deer-Horn killed this lusty brute. He was a messenger sent by Short-Ear to that sneaking hound of a millionaire, who is behind this dirty murderous plot," said Hunt.

"You are right," answered Baxter.

"And he left the written evidence of the gang behind him," answered Hunt. "There will be no trouble about this dead man. We had a right to kill him I take it, greater than the law out here. I am an American Mounted Scout, and have legal right to kill a fleeing murderer, who is about to commit another murder. Well, well! Anyway boys, this fool is dead. Get something from the pack horse to bury him with. We can't leave him here to be devoured by coyotes, although he wasn't much better than a sneaking coyote himself."

When the Squaw-man had been placed in a hastily dug grave the party hurried onward.

A bridge spanned the creek at this point.

It was one of those frail structures that were usually built off trails by hunting parties.

It was made of rough side bits of logs rough hewn from the forest of trees near at hand.

Rough boards had been placed lengthwise along this insecure frame work.

On the boards dirt had been heaped.

The bridge tottered and swayed as the party started over it. Grace led the way, the others following.

The bridge was placed twenty feet or more above the bottom of the turbid stream which could be seen angrily flowing over the creek bottom below, where great masses of jagged rocks seemed to be trying to stop the onward flow of the creek which was a great river now under the rain's steady flow of a few hours before.

"Take care, Grace," cried Trent, as he pushed his horse ahead of the others. "Take care!"

Hardly had he spoken when there came a trembling of the entire frail structure.

It swayed dizzily back and forth; it seemed to plunge forward; then under the frightened eyes of the men, it gave way.

With a scream of terrible fear, Grace Hopewell, and her horse, plunged forward, and amid the crash of timbers, and the wild yells of the men, disappeared into the terrible vortex, in the swollen waters of the depths below.

CHAPTER IX.

SHORT-EAR PAINTS FOR WAR.

Dog-Foot had sneaked along the line of the creek not twenty minutes before.

It was his hand that had taken the frail bridge frame apart, and never doubting that he had at length been successful in killing Grace Hopewell, when he heard the crash of the falling structure, he had hurried to the point selected by Short-Ear at which to meet, in great triumph.

To his surprise he found a vengeful savage awaiting him.

Short-Ear's face was now painted a deep carmine in huge stripes.

It made his features that of a fiend.

"Why you paint for war?" Dog-Foot asked in dire surprise. Short-Ear almost yelled in his ears the reason for his ferocious action.

"Deer-Horn shoot Wind-In-The-Cloud."

Short-Ear then told of the attack upon the dead Indian by the Assiniboine and the burial of the dead Squaw-man in an unmarked grave.

Ten seconds later Dog-Foot was painted for war.

Never had Trent and his party been in greater peril in all their journey; the bandits meant now to kill by any means, natural or otherwise.

All thought of the reward offered by Holt was now lost sight of by the two Indian bandits. They proposed to attack and kill the entire party of whites.

"We kill them all, now, each one," sneered Short-Ear.

"No care for reward now; we must avenge the blood of our brother, Wind-In-The-Cloud."

"Dog-Foot, you hurry back to cave. Tell every man to follow me. Make trip quick, by Gar, we now ready to kill these white-men. You hurry."

In less than an hour ten bandits all armed to the teeth were stealing through the forest to join Short-Ear. They were all of the gang that Dog-Foot found in the cave; the remainder of the outlaws were off on a cattle-stealing expedition.

Short-Ear greeted his companions with a grunt of pleasure.

When he told them finally of the death of Wind-In-The-Cloud the band became crazy with rage.

They all painted their faces with the terrible war-color, and in the action all thought of self ended.

They were ready to kill any living thing that stood in their way; to burn, maim, torture, plunder, or steal, not caring whether they were seen or not, but only wishing to kill; a treacherous gang of bloodthirsty devils.

Short-Ear however, managed to restrain the band.

"What use this fool killing," he cried. "We kill, but we no want to get juggled at Fort Marais. We on Canada soil now. Have-a-care. We take our revenge. We kill, but I lead. No harm come after this; no harm, I show how."

Short-Ear rapidly detailed his plans to Dog-Foot, after he had managed to quell some of the spirits of his men.

"No use attack now," he said.

"Why not?"

"Girl dead in dat fall, by Gar. She out our way, sure. We wait till men start back toward Fort, or go ahead toward odder Fort. Then we catch 'em in canyon, two miles long further, by Gar. We kill there."

"You mean we hide; shoot out from bushes?"

"Yes."

"Good."

"Dog-Foot, you stay here watch; bimeby you come ahead tell me. I take five men, go ahead and hide; you send five back, they hide. No matter which way come, or go, we kill. Yes, we kill, by Gar."

"Good," replied Dog-Foot.

Soon the bandit forces were split in twain as had been advised by Short-Ear.

The men had to make quite a detour to accomplish their purpose as it was broad daylight; and they feared that even in the terrible crash of the falling bridge and the fearful accident that had happened when Grace slid into the bed of the creek with her pawing horse, that the senses of her companions were not so dull that they would not scent the hand of a foe in the disaster.

The Indians therefore, were soon so far out of sight that they did not hear the thunder of the order that Hunt howled when he saw Grace fall to what he feared was her death.

"Deer-Horn, and Baxter," yelled Hunt. "Leave us to look after Grace's body. Each of you run to the rear, and down to the bed of the creek. Kill any Indian you see approaching."

Then with half the words said in the air, Hunt leaped directly down into the fearful depths of the ruin, where he could see the outlines of the horse, and saw the white hand of Grace just disappearing beneath the waters.

But if the action of Hunt had been like the leap of a lion, he had not been half as quick as Trent.

When he saw the girl disappear, Trent had launched right out into space.

Horse and girl had not struck the water, before Trent was there also.

It was a wonderful leap, taken with the quickness of the disaster.

As for Grace when she felt her horse falling she kept her

head and did not for a moment loosen her tight hold of her reins.

She had felt the bridge sway just before it crashed downward.

Instinctively she had pulled up her horse's head; had taken a firm grip on her steed with her knees, and thus kept the animal from toppling heels over head.

The expert days of her long years of horse-back riding stood her in good stead. She went into the chasm steady as a rock, every sense alert, and knowing that her life depended upon her own self. No human hand could save her until she had made the mad plunge.

The horse when he struck the ground, landed half in the water and half out of it.

Fortunately his head struck a great rock, and his brains were laid in a bloody heap upon it as the animal landed, while his feet were forced up under his body.

So absolutely instantaneous was the animal's death that he did not even quiver.

There was no threshing of iron-shod hoofs, no motion. Just a great crash and the animal lay still; then as the angry waters filtered around him, he turned sideways and floated out toward the middle of the stream.

Grace had tried to throw herself clear of the animal in mid-air.

But as she was riding astride her foot caught in the stirrup, and she could not loosen herself from the animal.

As she was plunged beneath the water she took a long breath, for like most Montana girls she could swim finely.

She waved her hand in the air as she was submerged.

And Hugh Trent with his wondrous leap was not a second behind her, and as he saw her disappear beneath the water plunged after her without a cry, but with his teeth clenched in his endeavor, until he felt the blood flowing down his face in the vigor of his attempt at a rescue.

Thus it was that Grace felt a hand grasp hers.

Then her head was raised above the water.

She took a gasping breath, just in time, for her lungs seemed to be bursting.

Then she went under again.

Trent saw the trouble.

He dove beneath the horse, and managed to unloosen the saddle cincho.

Then he came to the surface, ripped the saddle off with a fine effort of all his strength, plucked Grace from it, and grasping her arm pulled her backwards so that her body floated on the surface of the water with her mouth and nose above it.

Grace by this time had come enough to herself to be able to give some assistance.

"That's right," whispered Trent. "Try and float."

Grace had wit enough left to do so, and then supporting her as well as he could Trent managed to swim to the shore, where in less time than one could hardly fancy, the two people who had so narrowly escaped death, were sitting up, and Grace was trying to discover whether she was still a living breathing girl or not.

Hunt had meanwhile hurried into the water, not seeing in his excitement where Grace had gone, nor seeing the gallant rescue made by Trent.

He swam out to the horse who was finally drifting half submerged down the stream, and was diving madly about the animal in an effort to find the girl, with tears streaming down his face, when he heard a loud hail from shore.

"Hey, Hunt, what are you doing? Giving us an imitation of a diving hell-diver," the voice cried.

Hunt treaded water and looked ashore.

His surprise caused him to ship more water than he had taken aboard in a month of Sundays, as he afterward expressed it.

There on the shore with his face white with suppressed excitement was Trent.

Lying on the ground at his feet was Grace, who was still in a dazed condition with no clear idea of exactly what had happened.

Hunt swam ashore in six strokes.

"Is she dead?" he asked as soon as he landed, looking like some strange spirit just escaped from the deep.

"Is who alive—me?" asked Trent in the mildest manner.

"You? What in thunder do you think I care about you. I told you once that a man who had ridden on the crest of a landslide was destined to be hanged."

Poor Grace could not repress a smile.

"Any way," remarked Trent, "if Grace is dead she is able to smile at her plight."

The happiness of Hunt was extreme when he finally got

through his brain the great news that both Grace and Trent were alive.

"If I had your luck," Hunt said, "I'd go buy a stack of chips at the first faro bank I could find. You people couldn't lose. You are too lucky."

But when Grace tried to rise she found that she couldn't.

Her feet refused to hold up her slight form.

Yet she felt sure that no bones were broken. But she was wet to the core, her face was cut and scratched, her limbs were almost paralyzed and so the two men together had to carry her up the steep bank, where Sun-Mist met her, and assisted in trying to bind up her injuries.

In a few moments the girl managed to stand on her feet; and soon in spite of her painful bruises Grace was able to mount her horse, one of the pack animals having been taken for this purpose; her own steed lay a great mass of bruised bone and flesh, far out in the center of the tumbling waters, where it slowly was seen to be floating down-stream.

Trent was sorely bruised and almost exhausted by his daring leap.

But he was still full of fight and in spite of the pain his bruises gave him, assisted Hunt in the work of getting the party together.

"What do you think of the fall of the bridge?" Trent asked Hunt.

"It was fixed to fall when we were on it. How I could have allowed us to start over it knowing what I do of the conspiracy against poor Grace, I can't understand. I am a blamed poor leader. I ought to be deposed."

"Nonsense. What we want now is to make up our minds what to do further, for it seems to me that we had not better try this trail much longer. I think things happen too quick here for my safety."

Hunt laughed.

"We certainly are getting quick action for our money," he replied. "Now I am with you as to the character of this trail. It's too sudden-death a trail for your Uncle Dudley. I vote we take to the woods sudden like, and push across the mountains for Fort Marais. If this keeps on much longer they will get us sure. Those blamed bandits play a pretty strong game."

As he spoke there came the dull sound of the rifle of Deer-Horn followed by the quicker crack of the revolver of Gus Baxter.

"What's that?" cried Trent in alarm.

"Two shots, what did you think it was, a steam piano?" replied Hunt.

Trent could not help smiling.

He saw the stress of the day was getting on the nerves of Hunt, and he joined with him in hearty laughter.

This cleared up the strain quickly; nothing like a good laugh in time of peril to make the battle go bravely on.

"I suspect that our friends have met with the enemy," added Trent.

"Hope so," rejoined Hunt. "If they meet with anything that can be construed into an enemy and he don't shoot him, then Deer-Horn and Gus Baxter are no friends of mine. I would srike my grandfather if he were here."

"Where is your grandfather?" asked Trent innocently.

"I don't know; but if he was here the old man would have to put up the fight of his life with his gifted descendant."

"That's right, old chap, take it good humoredly. If you are going to be killed and I am going to be hanged as you predict, I want to see you smiling-like when I look at your corpse."

"You go—and be hanged right now," replied Hunt. "But here comes Deer-Horn, and behind him comes Gus Baxter."

The Indian's face bore a frown.

"Heap bad shot," he said as soon as he got within speaking distance. "Gun he k-i-c-k-e-d."

"Never mind long stories about your gun," cried Trent.

"What did you fellows shoot at?"

"Indians," replied Baxter quickly. "I know the fellow I shot at. It was a sneak they call Dog-Foot."

"Did you get him?"

"I fear not. He any way jumped into the bushes. We tried to thresh him out of them, but it was no go."

"Young man," sharply cautioned Hunt. "Don't you ever go after another Indian without getting him, and if you are sure you haven't got him, or if you aren't sure, don't go beating up bushes for any infernal Indian, for those fellows have educated trigger fingers, and they can shoot closer than our smooth-bore friend here, Deer-Horn."

"Ugh," replied the Indian. "I shoot all right. My gun he k-i-c-k."

The men roared and Grace who had meanwhile gotten herself

in pretty fair shape for the journey, thanks to the clothing on the pack-horse, limped over to see what all the merriment was about.

"You seem to be having a lot of fun," she said bewildered. "In spite of our danger you seem to be able to joke."

"As far as the danger is concerned," cried Hunt. "Never you fear danger. Why we are in no danger. This is a pink tea we are having out in this forest."

Trent winked at Grace, and then all hands turned to with a merry will and soon had the horses ready for the journey.

"If we keep on losing horses like this," Trent remarked, "we will have to hoof it into Fort Marais. What's the next thing for us to do?"

"Take to the woods," cried Hunt. "A merry woodman's life for mine. No beaten trail where they let trees down on you one moment, saw bridges under you the next, and make life such a merry jest that decent plain every day people who crave less excitement, feel they are safer camping out under the silent stars along with the rest of the wild animals."

Their merriment was suddenly checked. "Indian bandits," said Deer-Horn, who had been carefully looking about him all the while. "Look, there they come."

Dark forms were to be seen stealing up the side of the mountain and here and there could be seen the painted face and sullen eyes of an Indian painted for war.

"Mount and ride," said Trent. "Be quick." The party vanished into the depths of the forest. Behind them stole the outlaws eager for their blood.

CHAPTER X.

DEER-HORN'S RUSE.

The encompassed party hurried onward now, in serious earnest.

Hunt when danger was imminent had the faculty of turning the fears of those under his charge from their peril by bits of fun, for he knew that a panic stricken company, nearly always invited grave disaster.

But he showed great woodcraft as soon as the leafy forest had engulfed the party by placing Grace and Sun-Mist in the center of the little cavalcade, while he and Trent led the van, and Baxter and Deer-Horn brought up the rear. He had made it hard to hit any of his party with a shot as it was all spread out over a large space of ground.

"Say, old chap," remarked Trent, "we are sure up against it." "We are."

"This gang of bandits, for they are surely outlaws, have in some way learned of the death of Wipd-In-The-Cloud, and we have brought down the entire shooting-match upon our heads."

"We have awakened a hornet's nest. Now young man, don't be so quick to give killing orders to an Indian hereafter."

"They do seem to shoot quick, as the man said on Fourth of July when a big fire-cracker exploded in his hand."

"Joking aside what are your plans?" "I have only one plan."

"What is that?" "To escape."

"Of course, you idiot. But how?" "How do I know? I'm going to get away from the vicinity of the bandits without a fight if I can. Just how I don't know."

"But if you have to fight what are you going to do?" "What am I going to do if I've got to fight? What a bally idiot. I'm going to fight if I have to."

"Do you think you are going to get away?" "We have a Chinaman's chance?"

"What kind of a chance is that?" "About the same chance that any Chinaman has in America."

"That is no chance at all." "Just about that."

"Well, we will do our best." "I never found any man that could do any better than his best."

Just then Deer-Horn rode up at a quick pace. "Ugh!" he said.

"Never mind your 'Ugh's,' cut 'em out. If you have anything to say get it out of your system," snapped Hunt. "I have an important engagement at Fort Marais and I have no time to 'ugh' with you, Deer-Horn."

Deer-Horn looked his surprise. It was an unusual expression for his face to bear. Nothing seemed to surprise the Assiniboine.

"I have plan," he stuttered. "What is it?" asked Trent.

"Never mind. You go on quick. I see what, and tell you."

"Let him try out his plan," remarked Hunt. "Any old plan goes with me."

So the party hurried forward leaving Deer-Horn in the rear, where he began quickly to take action.

In a narrow place in the woods he had spied, he first dropped his hunting knife.

On the moss-covered green back-ground the knife showed at fifty feet distance.

Its blade caught the sun-light which filtered through the trees and Deer-Horn well knew that the Indian foe would see it many feet away. It was this fact that he counted upon.

Then Deer-Horn pulled two tough saplings of hickory down to the level of the ground.

These he tied together with a stout deer-skin thong. The two trees after the Indian had covered their tops with a few leafy boughs looked as if they had fallen into their position naturally.

On the top of the trees Deer-Horn built a leafy platform.

The saplings therefore, were confined by the deer-thongs but if any weight was put upon them, they would spring back to their original position.

The hunting knife had been placed just beyond the saplings but on the side away from the direction which the foe was stealing along.

To reach it the foe would first have to climb up on the top of the saplings.

Their weight on the two stalwart trees would release them, Deer-Horn calculated.

The weight on the trees as the two saplings sprang back, would hurl the two leading Indians far in the air.

Deer-Horn had devised a sort of spring-trap, which he knew would fling any one who mounted the saplings far in the air.

Then the wily Indian hid himself in the bushes and waited. Five minutes later dark forms stole through the forest.

Deer-Horn watched from his concealment. Secure in numbers and feeling that there was no danger from an attack from the flying whites, the Indians were hurrying onward at high speed.

The steel hunting knife caught the eye of two young bucks. Each was eager to get the coveted trophy.

They rushed toward the knife. Together they jumped upon the bent saplings.

Under their weight the two trees sagged a few inches. This released the deer-skin thong.

With a tremendous force the saplings sprang back into position.

The two Indians were hurled fifty feet in the air, as if by an invisible force.

They came crashing down to the ground. The head of one Indian was crushed like an egg shell.

He never moved after he struck the ground. The other Indian described the great arc of a half circle, and his brains were dashed out upon the ground, for he fell with a force that no human being could withstand.

Then from the bushes the rifle of the Indian spoke. It did not k-i-c-k this time.

With a steady flash, flash, flash, and roars of stunning effect, the Indian poured in a hail of bullets at the oncoming savages.

The Indians had combined their forces, evidently, after they had seen their plans miscarry and that the carefully arranged ambush would not be successful.

Groans and shrieks rent the air as the bullets of Deer-Horn plunged into the bodies of the Indians.

Several were seen to fall; others limped away wounded. But their advance was checked and Deer-Horn with the startling war-cry of his tribe vanished into the underbrush and in less than a mile was with the party of white men again.

"How," said Trent when he saw Deer-Horn join the rear guard as if nothing had happened.

He then fell back and listened to the story of how one red man had checked the advance of the bandits.

"Wonderful work," cried Trent. He then hurried forward to tell Hunt of his good news.

"That Indian may be has saved our lives," cried Hunt. "We must now try to make greater speed."

The unfortunate party gave free whip and spur to their now thoroughly jaded horses.

The roughness of the road retarded them somewhat. Hunt who knew the country well, however, led the way like a man who knew not fatigue, or who was so desperate that he did not think of a rest.

The remainder of the party hurried forward after him. "Where are you guiding us?" Trent at length asked.

"I am trying to get to the top of the mountain before night-fall," replied Hunt. "We have checked the enemy by the ruse

of Deer-Horn but they will soon be on our trail again, and I think if we can, we had better get to a place where when they make the next attack we will have the best of the situation. You see if we get to the top of the hill they will have to charge up it. As it is now, they can get behind us and get at us from both ways. On top of the hill they can only attack from one way."

"Well, we had better hustle. There come the demons now," rejoined Trent.

As he spoke shots began flashing out of the underbrush.

Flash! Flash! Flash!

Crash! Crash! Crash!

The rifles of the outlaws sounded in tremendous volume.

The bullets cut wide spaces in the trees; foliage fell upon the hurrying party.

But Hunt and his party had the better of the position.

They were hurrying along through the forest above the bandits on the mountain side.

The outlaws therefore had to fire up at them. This made their aim bad and, although some of the bullets came perilously near, no one was hurt although Deer-Horn was so nearly hit that he dodged quite down upon his horse's body to escape the terrible missiles.

"Only a hundred feet more," cried Hunt. "Now for one last fight on the mountain top. We will give these bandits an argument there that they will never forget."

Encouraged by the nearness to a shelter the party sped faster.

"Here we are," cried Trent, as he saw that the party had reached the top of the hilly crest of the Long Peak mountain. "There is the spot for us. Hurrah!"

As he spoke Trent pointed to a spot where even Grace saw the strategy of his plans in a second.

While thick underbrush skirted the bottom of the peak of the hill there was nothing but barren rocks leading up to the almost inaccessible top. There, she saw, a great table-land-like space.

It was well sheltered by heavy rocks, one part especially making a rude table, and which had given the spot the name of the Table Rock of Long Peak.

"There's the place for our fight," howled Hunt. "Now, you red scum of outlaws I am ready to show how the worm can turn."

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIGHT ON TABLE ROCK.

"Take plenty of time. That's the way. Don't shoot away good lead."

Thus Bob Hunt, American Mounted Scout, urged on his weary party as the great fight on the Table Rock of Long Peak began.

"A little more to the right, there, Deer-horn," Hunt continued.

"Rake those bushes in the back-ground, Baxter."

Hunt knew how to fight the Indian outlaws.

Experience gained on many deadly fields was his.

In the few minutes he had to get his party in a firing line he had accomplished wonders.

Hunt had disposed his people in a circle.

First came Deer-Horn. Next sat Grace. Then came Trent. Alongside of him was Gus Baxter, while Sun-Mist completed the circle, and Hunt knelt in the centre, and now and then peered through chinks in the great rocks at the enemy.

Such a disposition of forces, especially as the horses were hobbled blindfolded and roped down in the exact centre of the party made it possible for the tiny crowd to hold the spot against a regiment of men.

"We can stand this for ages," cried Trent, when Hunt crawled over to speak to him. "They can never charge the hill."

"Wait until we see what kind of a charge they can muster," replied Hunt. "We have two weak women with us. The men of the party are pretty well used up. The bandits may come in such numbers that by sheer force of weight they may get over and club us out."

"We wouldn't stand much of a chance in a hand to hand fight," dejectedly replied Trent.

"It's our play not to let it come to that."

The battle raged then with increased violence.

The shots of the wayfarers were beginning to tell.

While the enemy fired from cover, so searching and raking was the fire of Hunt's forces that it was soon evident that they were doing more damage than they were receiving.

There were movements on the part of the outlaws that showed that several of their party had been hit.

But to Grace fell the honors of killing the first of the enemy to die in the battle.

She had been firing away taking careful aim, using a rifle be-

longing to Trent, when she spun suddenly forward, falling in a heap over the weapon.

Trent thought she was killed.

His face was white as paper as he raised the girl.

"Are you hurt?" he said, anxiously.

"Get down, quick," cried Grace. "Quick as a wink."

Trent obeyed knowing well that her tones brooked no argument.

To his surprise Grace rolled over on her back.

She pulled her rifle upward as she did so.

She took careful aim.

Then there came the roar of her weapon.

From a tall tree that skirted the bottom of the rock, came whirling with the girl's shot, a great, stalwart Indian.

He shot downward a mass of huddled shapes.

His head struck the ground with a terrible impact.

He was dead.

"Splendid," cried Hunt to Grace who was very white about the mouth yet who was game to the core.

"I saw that fellow just aiming at us from the top of that tree," she explained. "There was no time to talk. I just threw myself on my face as he fired at me."

"That action saved your life," said Hunt.

The girl nodded.

"Then I threw myself over backward and pulled my rifle up to where I could get a shot at him. Then I fired."

"And killed him out of hand with a bravery I never before saw equalled by any woman. Grace, I am proud of you," answered Trent.

"I am not proud of myself," rejoined the girl. "But what was I to do? It was his life or mine."

"Of course it was," said Baxter. "This is no time to consider the question of human life. Kill or be killed is this day's problem."

Grace could not help but smile. But she sincerely regretted the unfortunate position that made her forced to kill to save her own life.

The enemy seemed to be so crestfallen over the death of the outlaw that they slackened their fire.

"There will be a charge soon," cried Hunt. "I see the terrible face of Short-Ear peering at us from that knoll back there but out of rifle shot."

"Let them come on. We are ready for them."

Baxter who had self appointed himself ammunition man, saw to it that every one was well supplied with cartridges.

"Let every person here look well to his weapon," advised Trent. "We are going to have the fight of our lives in a moment."

He spoke truly.

All saw that the bandits had massed themselves in a moon shaped formation, and were without doubt getting ready to charge.

"How many are there of them?" muttered Trent to Hunt.

"One, two, five, fifteen—I see twenty-three scalp locks," Hunt replied. "Oh, if I had only a tiny cannon here. How I would gather scalp-locks if I had a good cannon here."

"I am going to gather a few with this good old rifle," grimly said Baxter as he filled his magazine with new cartridges.

"Look out all," sang out Grace. "They are coming."

She was right. Up the hill the deadly charge began.

"Not a single shot is to be fired until I give the word," yelled Hunt.

"Get ready all," he added a moment later.

The on-rush was fearful for unsteady nerves to witness.

Every outlaw was painted in the horrid guise of Indian war. Each voice howled the long war-cry of the painted devils.

It was to Grace a fearful sight. But her face was flushed with the light of resolve. She was filled with the love of pure fighting that comes when called for through the veins of every American man or woman.

Sex, limitations, past training, everything was forgotten by this frontier-bred girl, for when Grace was a child these were the heroic deeds that she heard talked about over the camp-fire, and in the log cabin.

"Now then," she heard the steady calm voice of Hunt, the voice of a man used to just such deadly perils as this, "I will begin to count. When I say five, every person turn loose. Each man beginning with Deer-Horn take one of the foe, counting from right to left."

"How about me? I am not a man," cried Grace.

"You have played a man's part here today, young woman," answered Hunt as he began to count.

"One!"

"Two!"

The faces and forms seemed dreadfully near to Grace.

"Three!"

The voice of Hunt steadied Grace.

It seemed to say to her, "never fear, we shall win."

"Four!"

Grace's heart seemed to stand still.

"Five!"

Like the call of a trumpet the fatal number rang from the lips of Hunt.

As if one person had fired the splendid whirl of resistless lead, the pent up resolve of the defenders was transformed into action.

All Grace knew after that was that there was the flare of weapons; the long roll of sound from the guns, the sharp crack of revolvers; and then she came to herself with her hammer to her rifle clicking on used cartridges; her weapon's magazine was empty.

She looked into the space where the grim faces of the charging outlaws had been.

There was nothing there save a few writhing forms; a few still ones.

The charge was over.

The defenders had won.

Grace looked with great curiosity about her.

The scene was peaceful.

Hunt was just lighting his pipe.

Trent was cleaning his gun with his handkerchief.

Baxter was staunching the blood from a slight wound on his forehead.

Deer-Horn and Sun-Mist were talking together.

Grace gave a great gasp.

"We won?" she asked of Trent.

"Sure," he said with a smile. "Pretty bit of work that of yours. I was sure you had turned into a machine gun. You fired so steadily that it seemed to me there was no space between your shots."

Grace shook her head.

"I don't know that I was sensible of anything except to obey Hunt," she said.

"Grace, you have the stuff that makes fine soldiers," cried Trent. "The first and only duty of a soldier is that one word, 'obey.'"

Hunt interrupted them at this point of their conversation.

"Guess that will hold the outlaws for awhile," he said. "We stopped them right where they stood when I said five. It was the prettiest thing I have seen in years. Why we just mowed them down. We are even for all that the bandits have made us suffer."

"Will they charge again?" asked Baxter.

"Of course. These fellows are out for blood. They will never stop charging until we cut them to bits and they can't charge, or we are killed. That's red nature when aroused. No thought of self out in that gang; why man, they will fight after they are dead, like a rattlesnake."

As he spoke he turned toward Deer-Horn.

"Why did you leave the camp?" he asked.

"Scalps," replied the red-man.

Grace turned livid.

At his belt Deer-Horn bore the bloody, reeking scalps of four of the outlaws.

He had stolen out of the firing line and had scalped his dead foes, which was the only thing proper to do under the circumstances.

That is, it was the only proper thing for a victorious Indian to do.

"Take them away," Trent ordered. "If you must scalp your dead enemies for goodness sake don't bring the gory trophies here for white-folk to see."

"Supper," now cried Sun-Mist.

She had prepared a royal feast from the supplies in the camp, as Baxter called the beleaguered spot, and Baxter had loosened the horses, and led them behind some rocks to crop enough of the scant bunch-grass growing about to keep them from starvation.

The entire force, with the exception of Deer-Horn who took on himself the duty of sentry, fell upon the viands with a hearty good will.

"If I eat like one of those wolves that came so near eating me, do not be surprised," remarked Trent.

Hunt however, ate little.

Instead he was soon standing by a great rock, that was perched on a sort of table, and which he was busily examining when Trent strolled over to him with his mouth full of pie.

"Studying geology?" asked Trent.

"Hum," replied Hunt.

"That doesn't enlighten me at all," replied Trent. "Why this sudden interest in a great rock?"

"It weighs fifty thousand pounds if it weighs one," gloomily rejoined Hunt.

"What does?"

"This rock."

"Are you doing this to win a bet?"

"Hum."

"You made that extremely brilliant remark just a moment ago."

"Well, I am making it again."

"So I understand. The roar of guns has not interfered with the slight gift of hearing that nature gave me."

"It's a great scheme any way. I think I will try it."

"Try what?"

"The scheme."

"Are you talking in riddles?"

"Maybe. But listen."

Trent laughed and jumped up and down with pleasure, when Hunt detailed his plan.

"Now, not a word to any one about our scheme," Hunt cautioned. "You go quietly back and tell Deer-Horn to come and see me here, after he has eaten. Put Baxter out as sentinel when Deer-Horn leaves that post."

Trent did as he was bid.

After awhile Deer-Horn and Hunt returned to the party and there was another overhauling of weapons, for the sharp eyes of Baxter had detected another charge as being imminent.

"There will be a change in the method of defense," said Hunt when he was told of the renewal of the attempt on the part of the outlaws to storm the position held by his party. "I will take Deer-Horn with me. The remainder of the party will remain here and will fire when the enemy advances and will keep firing until I command the cessation of this duty."

"What is your plan, may I ask?" said Grace. "Am I to keep firing as I did before?"

"Exactly," replied Hunt. "But come, Deer-Horn we haven't much time to lose."

Soon the party saw the savages beginning to form again.

But they had changed their mode of attack.

They had constructed a sort of bullet proof screen of heavy trees and earth which several of their party bore before them.

Baxter gave a shout of dismay when he saw the contrivance.

"They will get us this time," he said. "We can't shoot them down now; the screen they are carrying is almost bomb proof."

"Don't get frightened before you are hurt," dryly replied Hunt. "I was thinking to myself that this was about what the outlaws would do. I would be a poor commander if I had not given the enemy some credit for brains. But don't worry. Just shoot all the time."

In a few moments the bandits began advancing at a rapid pace.

Not an arm even could be seen.

They were completely sheltered by the screen.

Nevertheless the bandits were met with a fierce fusillade.

The defenders of the place fought well. They sent a fearful fire toward the enemy but saw it was useless. The shots were all deflected, or were buried in the screen.

"Here comes our finish," cried Baxter. "We are powerless. We will all be killed."

The screen now was not twenty feet from the top of the knoll.

"Here they come. Look out, Trent," Baxter cried.

The outlaws were rushing forward like the wind.

In twenty seconds they would be over the rocks to club, shoot, or stab the brave company.

But just as the outlaws with fierce yells were making a last terrible run, an unaccountable event happened, which changed the entire aspect of the combat.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW THE BATTLE WAS WON.

"See that great rock totter. Hurrah!"

Gus Baxter, just as the bandits seemed to be certain of victory, threw down his rifle and with outstretched hand pointed to a strange scene.

Grace Hopewell was transfixed with surprise, while Sun-Mist laughed in glee, for the first and only time in her life.

A great rock toward which Baxter pointed was seen to be tottering as if about to dance a saraband on its stony base.

The rock was the one that Hunt had so carefully been examining and which had so excited the curiosity of Trent.

"Hunt's plan is going through," cried Trent in ecstasy. "Hurrah!"

"What plan?" asked Grace in wonderment.

"Look and you will see," came the swift answer from Trent. All saw a wondrous sight.

The bandits could not see what was happening shielded as they were by their screen invention.

Like many inventors, they were doomed to be the victim of their own inventions.

"Look," cried Trent. "There goes the rock. Hunt and Deer-Horn have pried it loose from its surroundings."

Trent spoke truly.

The great rock embedded in its resting place, weighing fifty thousand pounds or more, leaned over sideways.

It left its pedestal.

With a fearful sound of rending of rock from rock, the great giant stone loosened by the art of man, went thundering down the hill; and with a long final bound, crashed exactly through the centre of the screen behind which was grouped the entire outlaw force.

Never before even in this wild spot had there ever been such carnage.

There were nineteen bandits grouped behind the screen when the tremendous rock struck it.

In one second all were crushed to death, save Short-Ear.

Dog-Foot, his companion in his dreadful deeds, the joint murderer with him of poor Sam Turck, was crushed into no semblance of a human being by the terrible rock.

His death was followed by the panic stricken flight of his partner Short-Ear, who fled like the wintry wind into the forest depths as if he had wings.

The dreadful scene turned Grace sick in a moment.

Her terror was increased by the awful yells of Deer-Horn, who with his keen hunting knife in his hand leaped over the rocks to the scene of the fearful slaughter and soon his belt was dangling with the scalps of the outlaws.

But one single soul of the bandit gang lived after the plan of Bob prevailed; and not one of the dead men ever could have been identified, so completely were they obliterated from the world, by the fall upon them of the fearful rock of death.

Such a wonderful event saddened the travellers while at the same time it gladdened them.

The sudden retribution that overtook the outlaws was so complete, so terribly crushing, that the gallant band of defenders of their stronghold could hardly believe the evidence of their eyes.

All stood gazing spell-bound by the horror of the scene.

Hunt was the first to speak.

"They were caught in a pit of their own digging," he said in his deep manly voice. "We have won our hard fight. It was our lives, or theirs."

He signaled Deer-Horn to his side.

"Put those scalps out of sight," he said. "We have had enough of this feast of bloody death. We can now start for Fort Marais; before we were in danger every foot we passed over, now we are safe. Buried beneath that rock is the last of the bandit gang—save one."

"Short-Ear," cried Trent. "Leave his fate to me."

"No," replied Hunt. "Not to you, but to me. It is my duty as one of the American Mounted Scouts to arrest the miscreant. He thinks that he has gained his freedom by flight. But it is to me that the duty falls of pursuing him."

"What are you going to do?" cried Trent, as he saw Hunt mount his horse.

"The way to Fort Marais is now as safe as the streets of the large cities of the East," replied Hunt. "I am no longer your leader. I go to arrest Short-Ear and bring him to justice."

Putting spurs to his fine horse Hunt rushed down the forest glades on his mission.

"I hate to see him leave us," said Grace. "He has saved all of our lives."

"He is a brave man," replied Trent. "But he is a member of that magnificent organization the American Mounted Scouts. They never sleep. No man ever is safe from them if he has committed a crime. They never give up a search for a criminal until he has been brought to justice. They are making the wild American and Canadian border-land a place of safety where men who can develop the natural resources of these lands are not afraid of prevailing lawlessness, to invest capital. They are the new Pathfinders of our country."

"Here we have been so peaceful that it seems incredible that such a gang of outlaws like the band of Short-Ear could exist," said Grace.

"That is not so incredible after all," replied Trent. "You know that even in the middle West settled as it is, the fearful Jesse James gang lived for years. Short-Ear was our Jesse James."

"I am glad the Short-Ear band of outlaws is ended forever," cried Gus Baxter. "I don't like to ride my Pony Express route with any of those bandits lurking about."

Both Grace and Trent smiled.

"Before we go further," Gus added, "I have something to give to Grace."

"Something for me?" the girl replied in surprise.

Gus laid in her hands the package addressed to her in the handwriting of Sam Turck, murdered by Short-Ear and the now dead Dog-Foot.

Baxter told how he had found it amid the smoking embers of the Bitterwater Gap station, near the smouldering remains of the ill-fated station-keeper.

"Shall I open the package now?" asked Grace.

"We are only a few hours' ride from Fort Marais," Trent replied. "Deer-Horn says he knows a short cut through the forest thither. I do not think I would read that package until I get to the fort, if I were you Grace."

"Do you know what is in this envelope?" asked Grace.

"No," replied Trent.

"Do you suspect what it contains?"

"Yes."

"Then you think I had better not read it until I get to the Fort?"

"Yes."

Grace speculated over the strange circumstance for a long time. She turned the envelope over and over in her hand.

"I did not know Sam Turck," she said. "But I have often heard my dead father speak of him."

"Was Turck any relation to your father?" asked Gus Baxter.

"I do not know," replied Grace. "It always seemed to me that there was some mystic reason for my father's extreme care not to speak much as to who Sam Turck was. He did not care to say much about Turck's private affairs, although I suspect that there was some tie that bound them together. Whatever it was my father always spoke with an accent that showed that he had a great deal of fondness for Turck."

"Possibly all this will be explained in the letter you have in your hand," answered Baxter. "I have always thought that Turck had written the letter to you the night before he died, and had intended to post it through me when I made my rounds on the Pony Express route back to Fort Assiniboine. It was in my mind the last letter Sam Turck ever wrote."

"I shall not open the letter until we get to Fort Marais," finally decided Grace. "Whatever it contains I shall always feel that the dear old man, whom I do not think I ever saw in my life, remembered me as my father's daughter long enough to write to me the day before he was murdered."

Deer-Horn returned from a dash out among the foe, he then removed the traces of strife from his face and hands.

But still warm and reeking at his side were the scalps that he had taken from his enemies; once more in a peaceful land he had lived over again the wild days when every moon saw scalps hanging at his side.

The way to the Fort was not contested further.

The outlaws lay under the tombstone that nature had hewed from one of its convulsions of centuries before.

The white-folk again were figuring in the world of to-day; the redman lay dead where his fate had carried him, always, forever, in the great fight between red and white men, a fight as old as the history of North America.

When the Fort was reached Grace was immediately taken to the Indian Mission school where she was to teach.

She told her dreadful story to the superiors at the Mission, while Trent hurried away to make a report to the Canadian authorities and then while Deer-Horn and Sun-Mist joined the camp of the Assiniboines, after having been liberally paid for their services by Trent, Gus Baxter hurried off to prepare for his flying trip the following day back to Fort Assiniboine, with the Pony Express mail.

"It's the first time in five years that I got the mail in late this trip," said Gus, "but I have agreed with the mail-station men here to report my lateness under the head of 'unavoidable delay.'"

The jolly little man laughed and after shaking Trent's hand until his wrist ached, vanished with a hearty laugh.

"May his horse and he flit over the Pony Express trail for many years more," thought Trent as he saw the gallant little chap hurrying away.

Then Trent retraced his steps to the mission.

Grace met him at the door.

"To-morrow early," she said, "I want you to come here and help me open the letter of Sam Turck. I want you to help me decide what to do after we read its contents."

"I will be here," replied Trent, "Good night."

CHAPTER XIII.

SHORT-EAR MAKES HIS REPORT.

"Escaped? The outlaws cut to pieces? You alone alive of all your band? You lie, you Indian dog."

Sidney Holt howled these words at the last member of the outlaw band at his home near Fort Assiniboine.

Short-Ear had hurried thither to tell of the extermination of his murderous associates as soon as he had left the scene of the terrible deaths of his companions.

"It is true," the Indian replied to the now dreadfully frightened president of the Montana and Canada Land and Timber Discovery Company. "All dead, by Gar. I alone, now live."

The Indian had relapsed into his laconic tone when speaking to Holt.

"But how could six people, one of whom was an Indian woman, another a mere slip of a white girl, kill all your band of lusty Indians? Do you mean to tell me that all of you band-its, that I saw at your cave camp, are dead?" cried Holt.

"All dead, but me," replied Short-Ear.

"And you did not kill the girl?"

"No."

"And you did not kill Gus Baxter, and get back that package he dug out of the ruins at Bitterwater Gap station where you killed Sam Turck?"

"No."

"What have you done, you fool, but make trouble for me?"

The Indian outlaw lost patience.

"How you dare talk me, who you call fool, you man," Short-Ear cried. "By Gar, who to blame? Not I? Who tried hard to do your dirty work? I. Where are my men? Dead. By Gar, you tink you fool wiz me. I no stand your talk. Save my men? No. Save my money? No. All from your fool bidding. Why did I try to do your bidding and try kill girl? I knew no luck come in killing girl. Bah!"

"But you have done no good at all," replied the millionaire. "You have only made trouble for me. Don't you see that they will trace all this back to you? Don't you see that you will be arrested? Even now the American Mounted Scouts may be on your trail. You tell me that Bob Hunt led the party you tried to kill, and which exterminated your band. He may trace you here. Get out of here quick. I can not be seen here talking to you. Suppose you were arrested in my house?"

"What care I?" cried the Indian outlaw. "You can go swing with me. You just so guilty as I. If I hang, c-r-e-k-why you hang wiz me, by Gar. I tell that you hired me to kill Sam Turck. I will tell you hired me to kill Grace Hopewell, by Gar."

A dreadful convulsion passed over the form of Holt.

His face turned a deep red.

He staggered backward.

"Go," he said, "Go you murderer. I—"

The red flush swept to a wave of crimson.

Holt struggled to his feet.

He gasped for breath.

Then as a tree falls beneath the axe of the woodsman, Sidney Holt fell face forward on the floor in his beautifully fitted up home.

Apoplexy had killed him.

The strain of his emotions was too much for his full habit of life to withstand.

He died, the victim of the convulsions of fear the picture of his death on the gallows as placed before him by the words of Short-Ear, had called forth.

The outlaw stood for several moments shaken with dread at the mysterious, and sudden death of Holt.

Struck down when apparently in the flush of health, and from no visible cause, had shocked the truculent ruffian to his depths. He dared not call for aid.

He tried for several moments to bring the dead millionaire back to life, but soon saw that he was beyond human aid.

Then the question of his own neck became uppermost.

Short-Ear quickly forced open the desk of Holt, and took all the money he could find.

Then he looted the place of all its valuable silver.

"By Gar, I get away queek," said Short-Ear to himself, as he swung his plunder which he had wrapped up in an expensive rug over his shoulder. "I make good money after all. I get off; go far Northwest. There I live long, and happy. Buy much fire-water."

The outlaw started toward the door.

A huge black form halted him as he turned to escape.

"Hands up!" cried the figure. "You cur, hands up, I say!"

There in the doorway, blocking his plan for freedom, robbing him in a second of his dreams of a life of crime in a new environment, stood Bob Hunt, the American Mounted Scout, with a great revolver whose deadly muzzle was trained on the outlaw.

Short-Ear dropped his plunder.

It fell on the hard-wood floor with a tinkling crash.

The bandit's knees knocked together; he saw as if in a dream the day of his execution.

He put up his hands with a loud yell of dread.

The course of the last of the bandit gang had been run.

The long arm of the law of the land which he had violated for so many years with deeds of blood had reached out and clutched him just when he saw fortune before his eyes.

Bob Hunt had avenged the death of Sam Turck, and had taken the toll of the law when he arrested Short-Ear, Indian bandit.

As soon as he had firmly bound Short-Ear Hunt hurried to the side of Sidney Holt.

He saw in a moment that the millionaire was dead.

Hunt alarmed the servants in the house.

Sidney Holt's body was carried to an upper room to be prepared for burial and with one of these queer strokes of fate a letter lay on the table which he had evidently been reading when Short-Ear called.

Hunt took the liberty of reading the letter.

It told of the success of plans the dead man had made and which indicated that the career of crime upon which he had embarked with the outlaws had been entirely unnecessary.

"The irony of fate. This is what always comes to the crooked man in any walk of life," muttered Hunt as he led Short-Ear away to the Fort Assiniboine jail, which the outlaw did not leave except to be tried for the murder of Sam Turck, and later to be hanged for the dreadful crime.

* * * * *

When Hugh Trent called on Grace Hopewell the next day at Fort Marais she was awaiting him with some dread.

She hated to open the letter written to her by Sam Turck. It was as if a dead hand had reached out of the grave, to link his fate with hers.

But she bravely read the letter to the end, and then without comment handed it to Trent.

Her gasping breath showed Trent that the letter was important.

He read it carefully.

This is what he read:

"Bitterwater Gap Station,
Thursday night.

"MY DEAR GRACE:

"I am growing to be an old man—no, that is not right. I am an old man. And when age comes to us, my dear child, we look back at vanished years, sometimes wondering if all our acts are right.

"Now, while we have never spoken since you have become a charming young woman, there was a time when we knew each other well—but that was when you were a child.

"You may not know it, but you are my niece. Your dead father was my only brother. For many years we were in the timber business. We had as a special partner, Sidney Holt, now the millionaire timber king. Well, he made money; we did not, and we who know of the past, know now, that he made his money by tricking your father and by thieving from me.

"It has recently come to my knowledge that Sidney Holt is trying to gain possession of timber lands which belong to me. They are situated near the Canadian border. I had supposed up to a few days ago that they were valueless; but now I learn that they are worth millions of dollars. Had I known that I would have claimed them years ago, but Holt whom I had asked to go out to the lands and investigate them, had made me think them of no value.

"I fear that he will try to do you some harm; he may try to do me harm, but I am careful and do not see how he can murder me, for he is so black-hearted that I think he would not stop even at my murder to gain possession of the millions the property will bring if sold.

"I am alone at this station. I can not leave it. Will you not come to me? The title deeds are all in the Fort Assiniboine Frontier City banks' safe-deposit vaults.

"Further, the lands are registered in my name in the United States Government Land Office in Washington.

"I hear that Holt is trying to dispute my title; but never fear, the land is mine.

"It is enough to make us all rich forever. Come to me at once,

"Your affectionate uncle,

"SAM TURCK."

"Grace Hopewell, escaped from the deadly peril of the outlaws was the heiress to millions."

This thought went drumming from brain cell to brain cell of Hugh Trent.

"Grace," he cried finally when the great news had become a fact to his surprised intellect,

"Yes," the girl answered.

"You are worth millions."

"I suppose so, if this letter is correct."

"It must be correct, for you know the Land Office title is the best of the titles that one can have; I am an employee of the office in Washington, and it will not be hard for me to find exactly the status of your property. If you will commission me to take up the matter, you will find me a willing servant."

"Certainly I wish you to take up the question," said Grace. "It was through you and through Bob Hunt that I came to my fortune, if there is any fortune for me to come through to."

Grace and Trent laughed merrily when they thought that possibly there might be no fortune at all; the entire matter being the misunderstanding of the situation on the part of Sam Turck.

"I do not care whether there is any property or not," cried Grace. "I know now that Sam Turck's intentions were of the best toward me. I shall only always wish that his letter had reached me before the bandits had murdered him, because I might have been there and averted the crime."

"What could you, a weak girl, do against those outlaws?" replied Trent.

Then a picture of Grace standing with rifle in hand like the Goddess of battle, at the great Table Rock fight with the outlaws, came to Trent's vision.

He scratched his head with a smile, and said "that after all, he would not care to bet that Grace would not have won out in a fight for Sam Turck's life with the bandits, before his death."

"But I will hurry away," Trent continued, "and will write to Washington at once to exactly determine the property rights you have."

Trent who was a steam-engine when it came to doing things for Grace, not only wrote to Washington, but he commissioned Gus Baxter, to get all of Sam Turck's papers from the bank at Fort Assiniboine, where Turck in his letter to Grace had said his papers were to be found.

Then all Grace and Trent could do was to await answers, but as this made it necessary without doubt, for Trent to consult daily with Grace, and these consultations led to long rides in the splendidly clear Montana air, Grace for one, was not at all averse to the consultations, and it is safe to assume that Trent was not; at least no one heard that he shirked an interview.

While Grace and Trent were awaiting news from Washington, Bob Hunt was not idle.

He had found out the fact that the outlaws were in possession of a cave and he suspected that he was going to make some startling discoveries when he found the cave.

He was sure that it was full of the loot of the bandits.

It took many weeks of hard riding about the country to find the outlaws' cave.

Lieutenant Benton of the American Mounted Scouts, like Hunt, an enthusiastic member of the fine body of young men, rode mile after mile without being able to learn the slightest thing as to the cave.

Short-Ear, in jail at Fort Assiniboine sullenly refused to give any information.

One morning Hunt had an idea.

"Come on, Benton," he shouted to his companion.

"Whither away?" asked Benton.

"Off for the outlaw cave this time," cried Hunt.

"That's a jolly joke," cried Benton. "I am beginning to think that there isn't any bandits' cave."

"Yes there is. You just wait."

"Have you any news about the cave?"

"No real news, but a pretty strong suspicion that I am on the right trail."

"Very well, lead on to the cave, my boy. Only I am going to say right here that you are off at the top—there isn't any cave."

"Jeer away, my fine fellow, but this trip we will find the cave of the outlaws, sure pop."

"Seems to me you are in a trance."

"If I am don't wake me up."

Hunt led the way on his gray horse to the very foot of the high mountain where Sidney Holt had first seen a messenger wave him in the direction to the bandits' lair.

Hunt had no messenger but somehow or other he managed to start up a narrow trail along which the outlaws had usually proceeded to their home.

"I guess you have struck the right trail," cried Benton to Hunt. "Captain, look here. See, this trail has been traveled in the past few weeks. Look how the bunch-grass is pressed down by the hoofs of horses."

"And look here," said Hunt, as he swung down from his saddle and grasped a moccasin thong which some one had thrown away.

"That broken bit of hide shows the fact that men have been here," said Benton.

"We are on the right trail," Hunt replied.

In a few moments the two men stopped on the high point of land where the ill-fated Wind-in-the-Cloud had first met Sidney Holt, when the Squaw-man was acting as sentry for the Indians.

"Whew!" cried Hunt. "What a splendid place for a camp. Look here, why we can see twenty-five miles almost, in this clear air. If a fly stirred any where miles away, a sentry would be able to notify the outlaws of the fact, and they could escape long enough before any man could climb that long, narrow trail we have just come over."

A few steps further, Hunt saw the fissure in the great rocks that led to the cave itself.

He gave a shout of delight.

"Hurrah!" Hunt cried. "We have found the cave at last."

"We surely have," replied Benton in great excitement.

When the two men entered the cave they darted back in amazement.

"Why look at those furs," cried Hunt, "as he pointed to the floor or ground rather; of the cave, which was covered with beautiful furs in such absolute profusion that it all made Hunt gasp."

"There is a small fortune in furs here," remarked Hunt.

The men found things just as the bandits had left them, and Bob and Benton began a systematic hunt all through the cave.

In nearly every strong-box of the dead outlaws they found rolls of gold coins, and in the room-like place where Short-Ear and Sidney Holt had plotted to kill Grace Hopewell, and Holt had paid the outlaw the price agreed upon for the murder of Sam Turck, the two men discovered a large part of the chief outlaw's share of the plunder.

After the money had all been counted it was found that there was almost twenty-five thousand dollars, about the price for the murder of Turck.

"The bandits had not spent much of the blood-money," remarked Benton.

"No. They did not have time. They were so anxious to earn more murder cash, that they did not even get a chance to reap the pleasures they had expected to come from the money they already had. In fact, we kept 'em too bursting busy to spend their blood-money."

"You kept them busy all right."

Bob Hunt and Benton turned over the loot of the bandits to the authorities at Fort Assiniboine.

Then Hunt was sent for from North Dakota to root out a gang of smugglers and cattle-thieves, and he, and a detachment of scouts drew up at the Mission to say good-bye to Trent and Grace.

When he saw them he laughed; then he cried merrily:

"Well, when is the wedding to be?"

Grace blushed charmingly and laughed.

"In the early fall," replied Trent proudly.

"Congratulations, for both of you," cried Bob. "I will come and dance at the wedding."

Then with a wave of dust, and a great hurrah for Trent and Grace, Hunt and his brave fellow riders vanished in the early dawn of a cloudless day.

Trent turned to Grace as Hunt rode away.

"There goes a brave fellow and a good friend," he said to Grace.

"Indeed he is both," she replied. "We would not be here today, happy and content, if he had not led the fight at the Table Rock of Long Peak."

"By the way, Grace," said Trent, "I have news for you."

"What is it?"

"The Land Office at Washington confirms Sam Turck's title to the timber lands and you as his niece, and sole surviving relative, are in full possession of the splendid property. You are worth millions."

Grace gasped.

"Still further, the property is situated right where we fought off the outlaws, and the Table Rock of Long Peak, where we won the great fight is about in the center of your millions of dollars' worth of lumber."

Grace was overjoyed.

"I want Gus Baxter made the superintendent of the great lumber plant we must build to turn our timber into gold," she said, "and ten thousand acres of the best timber must be immediately deeded over to Bob Hunt, while a sum to be paid in the form of a pension sufficient to give Deer-Horn and Sun-Mist all that is dear to Indian hearts for life, must be awarded them."

"That's just like Grace; always thinking of someone else and their needs," said Trent with a pleased smile.

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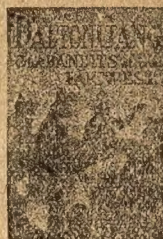
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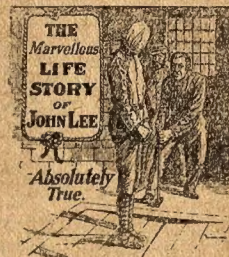
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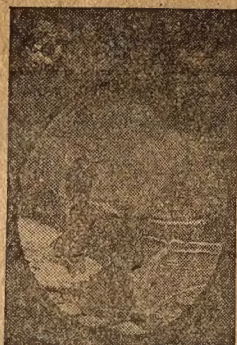
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